

PREACHING MORALITY WITHOUT PREACHING MORALISM
TO YOUNG ADULTS

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To my parents:

Louis and Janet Fletcher

Thank you for sharing your love for learning and your love for God.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the issues involved in preaching sermons on the moral imperatives of Scripture without preaching moralism. To determine how to preach such sermons the theological issues of the Law, salvation, sanctification and biblical preaching were considered. The preaching styles and convictions of Bryan Chapell, Tim Keller, Andy Stanley and Rick Warren were also examined and evaluated. This thesis concludes with the conviction that it is possible to preach morality without preaching moralism when a preacher holds to proper theological conviction and is intentional about preaching the gospel, the moral imperatives and the sufficiency of Christ.

CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM AND SETTING

Preaching is a daunting task. It's daunting because what a preacher most wants to accomplish is ultimately outside of his or her ability. The preacher wants the listener to be captured intellectually, emotionally and practically by the beauty, majesty, goodness, holiness and grace of the triune God. And at the same time, he or she wants these same listeners to not only be captured by these truths but also changed. Ultimately, all preachers know that they cannot force, manufacture or manipulate a lasting change of mind, heart and practice in their listeners. They know that in the end, this is the work of the Holy Spirit. But they also know that in some mysterious way they play a part in the process. They hear the whispers of Paul from the pages of their Bible. In Romans 10:14b, 17, he says: "... how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher... So, faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." In 1 Corinthians 9:16 he says, "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel." And from 2 Timothy 4:1-3:

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires.

Every responsible preacher feels the weight of the call to communicate as clearly as possible so that the listener hears, understands and responds rightly to the message of the gospel.

Pastors around the world wrestle weekly with their message and their presentation. As they prepare to preach they know that they must consider the truth of the Scripture as well as the audience to whom they speak. As John Stott says, the challenge of every preacher is to preach between two worlds. "A true sermon," Stott says, "bridges the gulf between the biblical and the modern worlds, and must be equally earthed in both."¹

The preacher must bridge the biblical world and the world of his or her congregation. The task becomes most formidable when it appears the message preached is in conflict with the posture of the audience. How do you preach humility to the proud or forgiveness to the betrayed? And how do you preach morality to a generation ambivalent to or even appalled by the whole conversation of morality and ethics?

The challenge of preaching morality without preaching moralism to this ambivalent and amoral generation is the dilemma I want to probe. First I will consider the prevalent worldview of the audience and then the dilemma of preaching the message of morality to this audience.

The Audience and The Setting

The audience considered in this thesis is young adults from 18 to 35 years old. If we cannot communicate clearly to this generation I believe we will easily lose the generations to follow.

I live, minister and preach in the city of Los Angeles. Our congregation is multi-cultural, multi-racial and multi-generational. We represent the melting pot known as the United States. People move from major cities and rural townships to live in our city and

¹ John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 10.

some of them find their way to our church. We are committed to reaching the young adult population of our area and have over 800 who fit this demographic attending our weekend services. Over 82,000 young adults live within five miles of our campus.² Therefore, we feel the responsibility and the joy of providing each of them an opportunity to have an encounter with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We hope to reach them through relationships and intentional evangelism and discipleship. But, we also seek to have impact through the ministry of preaching. We want to be a church where the gospel is not only lived but preached, and not only preached but lived. And, as said before, to do this we must build a bridge from the truth of the Bible into the lives of young adults and this requires a proper hermeneutic of the text and the audience.

As I interact with the young adults of our community they seem to be enamored with spirituality and the idea of belonging to a faith community. They are similar in that most seem to enjoy excellent worship and to view Jesus as loving and kind. But, they also show some differences which cause me to place them in two categories or group-types (although the lines are often blurred) when I consider their understanding of biblical morality.

Group one has no problem embracing community, spirituality, worship, and some understanding of Jesus, but they do not see the morality proposed in Scripture as essential to their experience of faith. Simply put: for this group, morality is relative to their conscience.

² This information is based on statistics received from Los Angeles real estate developer, Bob Walsh, in 2006. His statistics show 602,000 people living within five miles and over 82,000 of them fall into the ages of 18-35 year olds.

In contrast, group two is acutely aware of moral absolutes. This group thinks of religion and/or Christianity as simply a list of do-s and don'ts. As a result some members of this group ultimately reject Christianity as an impossible task because they find the moral imperatives too burdensome. But, others in this group don't give up on Christianity but instead embrace it with a religious fervor and an *older son* determination that is more about their own attempts to gain God's approval rather than the gospel of grace. Although they may appear Christian, as Eugene Peterson suggests, they have really just constructed "a way of life in which (they) have no need of a saving God."³ Their spiritual path does not lead them to a dynamic encounter with the living God but actually distances them from him. They are not even aware that their religious zeal and sin-management actually keeps them from Jesus. Ultimately, they (consciously or unconsciously) see no true need for a savior because their security is grounded in their own attempt at goodness.

Group one is morally apathetic and group two is morally fervent but both are devoid of a true understanding of the gospel. Of course, these observations are simply made from my relationships and years of pastoral counseling, but statistical findings also support the reality of this first group of young adults who are apt to disregard biblical morality.

In 2008, the Barna Group published these findings from a poll they did among adults under the age of 25:

Two-thirds of the under-25 segment (64%) had used profanity in public, compared to just one out of five Boomers (19%). The younger group—known as Mosaics—was nine times more likely than were Boomers to

³ Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 145.

have engaged in sex outside of marriage (38% vs. 4%), six times more likely to have lied (37% vs. 6%), almost three times more likely to have gotten drunk (25% vs. 9%) and to have gossiped (26% vs. 10%), and twice as likely as Boomers to have observed pornography (33% vs. 16%) and to have engaged in acts of retaliation (12% vs. 5%).⁴

Time reported in 2009:

More than 5 million unmarried couples cohabit in the U.S., nearly eight times the number in 1970, and a record-breaking 40% of babies born in 2007 had unmarried parents (that's up 25% from 2002) . . . But, nonmarital births have increased most among women ages 25-39, doubling since 1980, thanks in part to a small but growing demographic a sociologist dubbed committed unmarrieds (CUs).⁵

These statistics show the increasing trend of young adults to make choices in conflict with biblical morality. These trends are no different among professing “born-again” believers according to the data collected by David Kinnamen and Gabe Lyons in their book, *Unchristian*. They say:

In virtually every study we conduct, representing thousands of interviews every year, born-again Christians fail to display much attitudinal or behavioral evidence of transformed lives. For instance, based on a study released in 2007, we found that most of the lifestyle activities of born-again Christians were statistically equivalent to those of non-born-again. When asked to identify their activities over the last thirty days, born-again believers were just as likely to bet or gamble, to visit pornographic websites, to take something that didn't belong to them, to consult a medium or psychic, to physically fight or abuse someone, to have consumed enough alcohol to be considered legally drunk, to have used an illegal, nonprescription drug, to have said something to someone that was not true, to have gotten back at someone for something he or she did, and to have said mean things behind another person's back.⁶

We see these statistics and it is tempting to simply write the emerging generation off as completely immoral. But, Tim Keller gives this intriguing insight:

⁴ The Barna Group, “Young Adults and Liberals Struggle with Morality.” The Barna Group, published August 25, 2008. <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/25-young-adults-and-liberals-struggle-with-morality> [Accessed May 9, 2009].

⁵ Lisa Selin Davis, “Everything but the Ring,” *Time*, 25 May 2009, 57-58.

⁶ David Kinnamen and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 47.

Despite what you think from a casual perusal of any video store, bookstore, or magazine rack, we do not live in an immoral society— one in which right and wrong are clearly understood and wrong behavior is chosen. We live in an *amoral society*— one in which “right” and “wrong” are categories with no universal meaning, and everyone “does what is right in his or her own eyes.”⁷

Unfortunately, an amoral society creates a far greater challenge for the church and for the preacher. When young adults know what they are doing is wrong and they choose to do it anyway you do not have to convince them of their immorality. But if they have no category for right and wrong, as Keller suggests, it makes the delivery of the biblical message of morality much more challenging. Graham Johnston notes that in post-modernity morality is blurred and given over to subjectivism, relativism and me-ism.⁸ As a result of this thinking Johnston states that “preachers must not only point out the moral way but also establish why one should care about morality in the first place.”⁹

If Keller and Johnston are correct, the preacher today faces the dilemma of how to speak to an audience that is ambivalent toward morality and lives in an amoral age. And yet, as ambivalent as young adults seem toward morality it still appears intuitive for all people — the moral, immoral and amoral — to think that when it comes to God they must gain or earn his approval through some form of goodness or ethical act. Keller calls this striving to earn the approval of God, “religion.” He says:

A fundamental insight of Martin Luther's was that “religion” is the default mode of the human heart. Your computer operates automatically in a default mode unless you deliberately tell it to do something else. So Luther says that even after you are converted by the gospel your heart will go back to operating on other principles unless you deliberately, repeatedly set it to gospel mode. We habitually

⁷ Timothy Keller, “Preaching Morality in an Amoral Age,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, eds. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 166.

⁸ Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 39-43.

⁹ Johnston, *Preaching*, 43.

and instinctively look to other things besides God and his grace as our justification, hope, significance, and security.¹⁰

The Problem

Because the “default mode of the human heart” is religion while the worldview of the age is amoral and relativistic, preachers face a problem of communication. When young adults consider the claims of Christianity they often hear only the moral imperatives without hearing the message of grace, or they only hear the message of grace without hearing the message of morality. But the Bible is filled with both messages. From Genesis to Revelation the Bible puts on display both the mercy and the mandates of God. Jesus, before his ascension, commissions his disciples to make disciples and to “teach them to *obey* everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). Paul declares that “...the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord” (I Corinthians 6:13b), he is also clear that the approval of God is not earned but given as a gift (Ephesians 2:1-9). So, how does the preacher teach obedience without appearing to suggest that salvation (and even sanctification) is somehow earned through this obedience? How is morality preached without defaulting to tactics of guilt and shame? How is the gospel of grace presented without cheapening grace or suggesting that morality is negotiable? And, how is the fullness of a Savior who came in grace *and* truth preached in a way that it can be understood?

In preaching among evangelicals there are at least two schools of thought trying to address this issue. I will refer to the first school of thought as the *Preaching for*

¹⁰ Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 114-115.

*Change group*¹¹ and the other as the *Christ-Centered Preaching group*.¹² Both of these groups are committed to preaching the Scripture, they acknowledge the moral imperatives of the Bible, and they desire to see life-change in their listeners. The difference comes in what they choose to emphasize in their actual preaching. The emphasis of the Preaching for Change group is life-application. The emphasis of the Christ-Centered Preaching group is the gospel. By gospel they mean more than just the issue of sin and the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ. This is included in their emphasis but their understanding of gospel is much more layered and nuanced. This group sees the gospel as the full biblical narrative, the story of redemptive history and biblical theology.

Of course, both groups believe that the gospel *and* life-application are important but they differ in their emphasis. I believe that preachers have something to learn from both of these schools of thought and I will consider the writings, teachings and preaching of exemplars from each camp.

The Thesis

Ultimately, every preacher who is concerned with preaching all of Scripture along with the message of grace and truth to young adults is driven to the question of this thesis: *How can I preach morality to young adults without preaching moralism?* I will consider the theological and biblical implications of these questions in chapter two but, first, it is helpful to consider Peterson's insight on morality and moralism:

¹¹ This distinction comes from Andy Stanley's book, *Preaching for a Change*, and his emphasis on life-change as the ultimate aim of preaching.

¹² This distinction comes from the title of Bryan Chapell's book, *Christ-Centered Preaching*.

I am going to use the term “moralism” to designate the common, seemingly inoffensive, but in fact disastrous betrayal of Jesus. But note the word carefully. The root word is “moral,” a glorious and necessary word. Morality is built into reality as deeply and inescapably as atoms and protons and neutrons. We are moral beings to the core - the very universe is moral. Right and wrong are embedded in creation. It matters what is done, said, believed, even thought. Morality is fundamental and non-negotiable Moralism is something quite different. Moralism means constructing a way of life in which I have no need of a saving God.¹³

Again we arrive at the question of this thesis: *How can preachers preach this “glorious and necessary” morality to young adults without preaching moralism?*

Therefore, my thesis is: to be true to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to the Scripture preachers can preach morality to young adults without preaching moralism by examining, critiquing and applying the work of exemplars from the Christ-centered preaching model and comparing them to exemplars from the preaching for life-change model and ultimately determining a path to preaching God-exalting, grace-infused sermons that honor the “glorious and necessary” moral imperatives of Scripture.

In the following chapter, I will consider the biblical and theological framework for preaching morality without preaching moralism. I will clearly define the terms *morality* and *moralism* and I will look at the biblical and theological issues surrounding the Law, justification, sanctification and preaching. For preachers to preach effectively they must have a solid understanding of the biblical aim of preaching and what ultimately elicits moral and grace-filled living in the life of a true follower of Christ.

¹³ Peterson, *Christ Plays*, 145.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Definitions and Explanations of Terms

Before entering into a discussion on the biblical and theological framework for preaching morality to young adults without preaching moralism I must define and explain two significant terms used in this thesis: morality and moralism. Following the definition of these terms I will consider the biblical and theological nature of the law, salvation, and sanctification and preaching.

Morality

The dictionary defines *morality* as:

1. The quality of being in accord with standards of right or good conduct.
2. A system of ideas of right and wrong conduct: *religious morality*; *Christian morality*.
3. Virtuous conduct.
4. A rule or lesson in moral conduct.¹

This leads to the definition of *moral*, which is:

1. Of or concerned with the judgment of the goodness or badness of human action and character: moral scrutiny; a moral quandary.
2. Teaching or exhibiting goodness or correctness of character and behavior: a moral lesson.
3. Conforming to standards of what is right or just in behavior; virtuous: a moral life.
4. Arising from conscience or the sense of right and wrong: a moral obligation.²

The Bible is filled with records of morals and morality. From the very beginning God gives mankind a command: “. . . from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil

¹ "Morality." *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. 13 Jun. 2009. Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/morality>.

² "Moral." *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*.

you shall *not* eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:17). Implicitly, God is making a moral judgment. To eat from the tree is bad (“you will surely die”) and to *not* eat from the tree is good (for then you will not die). Perhaps the best known biblical record of God’s moral standard is found in the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. By commanding against an action it is inferred that God is saying that this action is wrong, bad and, thus, *immoral*. He says clearly in Exodus 20 that it is wrong to have other gods before him (20:3); to take the name of the Lord in vain (20:7); to murder (20:13); to commit adultery (20:14); to steal (20:15); to bear false witness against your neighbor (20:16); and to covet (20:17).

When God commands *for* an action or attitude we infer that that action or attitude is right, good and, thus, *moral*. In the list of the Ten Commandments, God affirms that his people must remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy (20:8) and that they must honor their parents (20:12).

The ultimate positive command of God is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-6: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.” This is the command that Jesus references when asked by a lawyer, “...which is the great commandment in the Law?” (Matthew 22:36-38). Jesus then adds that “the second (great commandment) is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:39-40).

The Bible is filled with the positive and negative commands of God, the declaration of the moral and the immoral. For instance, John Piper read through just the

gospels and found over 500 commands (including implied commands such as, “Blessed are the merciful” which implies “Be merciful”).³ Therefore, to be true to the entire Bible, the commands of God must be preached and the moral imperatives of Scripture must be upheld.

Surely, it is enough to preach morality simply because to do so is to be true to the Bible, but morality must also be addressed because of the current confusion in the human mind and heart. As noted in chapter one, our culture is becoming more and more amoral and this means that many are indifferent to morality or have no standard upon which to base their moral choices. This does not mean that they have no standard at all — it is just that they have made *themselves* the purveyor of right and wrong.

C.S. Lewis uses the innate moral sense of people as an argument for the existence of God in his classic work, *Mere Christianity*. He also suggests that men and women do have a standard by which they believe people should live (although they may not all agree on what this particular standard is). He calls this the Law of Human Nature and suggests, “Human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it.” But, he adds that, unfortunately, humans “. . . do not in fact behave that way. They know the Law of Nature; they break it. And these two facts (that people have a standard and they break it) are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in.”⁴ This understanding of morality as somehow innate to the human experience adds to the necessity of preaching morality. Certainly, men and women need help in navigating what they are intuitively

³ John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 34-35.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1980), 21.

aware of — morality (even if they are conflicted about how to define it). They need to know what is moral and immoral.

But unfortunately when morality is preached the dilemma is this—what is actually being heard by those sitting in the pews? According to the insight mentioned above from Luther, many will hear moralism when they hear morality preached whether or not that is the intent of the preacher. Therefore, I must define moralism. Later I will discuss the significance of the Law upon this discussion of morality and moralism.

Moralism

The temptation in the Christian life is to respond to the moral imperatives of Scripture with moralism. In this thesis morality is juxtaposed with moralism. It is worth repeating the words of Peterson:

We are moral beings to the core - the very universe is moral. Right and wrong are embedded in creation. It matters what is done, said, believed, even thought. Morality is fundamental and non-negotiable . . . *Moralism is something quite different. Moralism means constructing a way of life in which I have no need of a saving God.*⁵

Peterson asserts that when moralism is applied to life, the need for a saving God is eliminated. Because the default mode of the human heart is religion, many determine that, if there is a God, the way to gain salvation is through moral living. This is moralism. It is people believing that through their own self-effort they can attain salvation from God. This is not Christianity. The position of the Christian gospel is that there is no way to earn the favor or acceptance of God. Lewis explains, “. . . the Christian thinks any good he does comes from the Christ-life inside him. He does not think God will love us

⁵ Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 145 (emphasis mine).

because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us.”⁶ Christianity asserts that salvation (the acceptance of God) is attained not by the work of people but by the work of God. Moralism, however, puts the emphasis on the work of people and by doing so, eliminates the need for God.

In his discussion of the parable of the two sons, Keller illustrates this understanding of moralism by referring to an excerpt from the writing of Flannery O’Connor. Keller notes,

In her novel *Wise Blood*, Flannery O’Connor says of her character Hazel Motes that “there was a deep black, wordless conviction in him that the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin.”⁷ This is a profound insight. You can avoid Jesus as Savior by keeping all the moral laws. If you do that, then you have “rights.” God owes you answered prayers, and a good life, and a ticket to heaven when you die. You don’t need a Savior who pardons you by free grace, for you are your own Savior.⁸

The subtle deception of moralism is that it doesn’t actually drive people to Jesus but instead it drives them away from him while they are naively unaware. One of the distinctions of sin is that it involves the desire to be our own god, to live in control of our own destiny, and to live independently of our Creator (Genesis 3:1-7; Isaiah 53:6a; Romans 1:18-25, 3:1-7). Paul says,

For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (Romans 10:2-4, NIV)

⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 64.

⁷ Flannery O’Connor, *Wise Blood: A Novel* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990), p. 22, quoted in Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 37-38.

⁸ Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 37-38.

It's significant that Pau says that they sought to establish their own righteousness. In this sense, they were moralists. Richard Lovelace says, "In all his preaching of the kingdom of God, Jesus did not look for moral achievements in his followers, but for faith in himself."⁹ For this reason it is clear that preaching moralism is not true to the Christian gospel. All preachers must examine their own hearts and minds to know if they have a tendency toward moralism and therefore might be tempted to preach this unsound doctrine. Sound preaching emphasizes faith, not moralism. Paul confronted the church at Galatia on this very issue when he asked,

... Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? ... Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? (Galatians 3:2-5, NIV)

Paul is noting that the Galatians did not receive the Spirit—and thus, salvation—by observing the law but by believing the gospel that they heard. He then suggests that if salvation is not brought about by observing the law but by belief, then sanctification is the same. Later, I will consider this more by looking at the doctrines of justification and then sanctification. But, before I enter into that discussion I must first consider the role of the law in Scripture.

The Law

The law is significant to this discussion because it is what comes to mind when contemplating morality in the Bible. It is the law of God that sets the standard for what is moral and what is immoral for the Christ-follower. Often when the Bible speaks of the law it is referring to the Law of Moses recorded in the first five books of the Old

⁹ Richard F. Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 133.

Testament. But, the law also includes all the commands of God as well as the Ten Commandments. It also includes the ceremonial and civil laws. These laws are recorded as moral imperatives and there are many.

When preaching morality the preacher must have an apt answer to the myriad of questions that arise concerning the law: Why do we no longer observe the ceremonial laws and yet we still uphold the moral laws? Didn't the law merely serve as a tutor to show us Christ and therefore the discussion of it is moot? Why did God give us the law if he knew we could not and could not keep it? Isn't the law for the Old Testament and grace for the New Testament? What is the purpose of the law today?

I will answer these questions and others that are significant to this discussion by looking at: (1) The Initial Purpose of the Law; (2) The Problem with the Law; and (3) The Fulfillment of the Law.

The Initial Purpose of the Law

In this section I must address the initial, pre-fall purpose of the law and then I will address the purposes of that law that were a result of the fall. Note that the initial pre-fall purpose of the law does not change when sin enters the world but, rather, the law will take on more meaning in the story of redemption.

First and foremost the Law is a necessary expression of the nature and character of God. Theologian Vern S. Poythress suggests, "In one sense all the commandments are summed up in one, "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:20).¹⁰ God is holy and it makes sense that he calls his creation to holiness. God is also creator and therefore the rightful King over his creation. Poythress says that the law expresses

¹⁰ Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1991), 103.

God's rule because it imposes order, it displays the character of God and "it specifies the way life is to be lived within God's dominion."¹¹

If the law is not seen as a good, right, gracious and a just expression of God then it becomes an arbitrary list of rules to burden and unduly test men and women. But, when the law is understood as a reflection of God's nature it becomes an invitation to the glorious imitation of his beauty. As said, Piper studied the moral imperatives found in the Gospels while considering the law of God and concluded: "What emerges again and again is that what (God) is commanding is a life that displays the worth of his person and the effect of his work. His intention is that we not disconnect what he commands from who he is and what he has done."¹² So, the commands extend from the person of God to the creation of God and are therefore relational in nature.

The relationship of humans with God was first built around commands that reflected this relationship—a relationship that was never intended to be one of peers or equals but that of a creator with his creation; a benevolent King with his dependent subjects. Genesis 1 is clear about the nature of men and women. First, they are created beings and thus, they have a creator (1:26). Second, they are made uniquely in the image of their Creator (unlike the animals and plants that are never designated as image-bearers). Third, they are dependent upon God for everything in life: food (1:29-30); place (1:1-25; 2:8); and purpose (1:26b-28). And fourth, from the very beginning they were made to live by faith. Hebrews 11:6a says, "...without faith it is impossible to please God..." It is tempting to think that faith only becomes necessary after the fall when

¹¹ Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ*, 78.

¹² Piper, *What Jesus Demands*, 19.

humans found their relationship with God broken. But actually the invitation to live by faith was presented long before sin ever entered the equation. In the very beginning, God commanded people to rule, to multiply and to reflect his image. By keeping these commands Adam and Eve expressed their faith in God as their benevolent creator, ruler, and king. It is important to note that they were never keeping the commands to *gain* their right-standing with God.

Luther explains that Adam was created with an inherit righteousness and without sin and therefore did not need to keep the command given in Genesis 1 to earn any form of justification. He says, “This task (tending and keeping the garden) would truly have been the freest of works, done only to please God and not to obtain righteousness, which Adam already had in full measure and which would have been the birthright of us all.”¹³

This is a significant insight into God as a law-giver. God’s commands were not arbitrary or a means to gain his approval but, rather, an invitation to a relationship of faith. Wayne Grudem defines faith as “trust or dependence on God based on the fact that we take him at his word and believe what he has said.”¹⁴ Adam and Eve were created to live in this type of trusting and dependent relationship which we define as a life of faith in God. But, unfortunately, their life of faith does not last long in Genesis. God commands his new creation not to eat of one particular tree. Again, this is an invitation to a relationship of trust by not eating of the tree. But, they do not honor God’s command and they eat the fruit of the tree. Is it the tree that is evil? Is it the tree that produces sin? Luther declares that it is not the tree that is the root of sin but the unbelief in the heart of

¹³ Martin Luther, *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 296.

¹⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester; Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity; Zondervan, 1994), 1241.

Adam and Eve. “Hence when a man is good or evil,” Luther says, “this is effected not by the works, but by the faith or unbelief, as the Wise Man says, ‘This is the beginning of sin, that a man falls away from God’ [Cf. Sirach 10:14-15] which happens when he does not believe.”¹⁵ So at the root of sin and law-breaking is un-belief or un-faith. Adam and Eve were meant to live by faith but instead chose un-faith and rejected God’s command and chose to trust in themselves and the serpent rather than the creator.

The reality of sin and the resulting fall of men and women are significant to this discussion. While initially the law was a reflection of the nature and character of the creator and an invitation to a relationship of faith, after the fall the law takes on an added purpose. After the fall, the law *also* reveals the need for a Savior and becomes a pathway to Christ (while not ceasing to be an expression of the character of God and an invitation to a relationship of faith). After the fall it becomes impossible for humans to perfectly keep God’s commands as we will see below. And as stated above, the law becomes a pedagogue to Christ. Paul says this in Galatians 3:24, “Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith.” In his commentary on this passage Luther says:

The true function of the law is to bring me to the knowledge of my sin and to humble me, so that I may come to Christ and be justified by faith. But faith is neither law nor work, but an assured confidence that lays hold of Christ, who is the end of the law (Romans 10:4). How? It is not that he has abolished the old law and given us a new one, or that he is a judge who must be pacified by what we do. He is the end of the law to all those who believe; that is to say, everyone who believes in him is righteous, and he will never accuse such people. The law, then, is good, holy, and just if we use it as we should.¹⁶

¹⁵ Luther, *Three Treatises*, 298.

¹⁶ Martin Luther, *Galatians* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998), 187.

So the law now points us to Jesus while it continues to be what it always was: a right reflection of a holy God and an invitation to a relationship of faith with him.

Unfortunately, the law is often seen simply as a pathway to the approval of God. But it must be clear that, as Geerhardus Vos points out, observing the law was *never* “the meritorious ground of blessing.”¹⁷ Vos also suggests that to only read Paul on the purpose of the law one could be led to believe that the Old Testament is to be identified with law and the New Testament with gospel. But, Vos says that this is not Paul’s intent nor is it true about the law, for he notes, even Paul in Romans 4:16ff., “speaks at length of the role played by faith in the life of Abraham, and how it virtually dominated the entire Old Testament system.”¹⁸ So, to be clear, the following discussion of the problem with the law after the fall is not suggesting that grace did not exist in the Old Testament.

The Problem with the Law

After the fall, the Law of God poses three problems: (1) sinful people cannot perfectly keep the law; (2) because of sin, the law arouses more sin; and (3) the law cannot justify people to God. I will deal here with each of these issues.

Sinful people cannot perfectly keep the Law. Scripture is clear that after the fall it became impossible for men and women to perfectly keep the law of God. Paul speaks to the effect of the sin nature upon obedience in Romans 7:14-19:

For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing

¹⁷ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 128.

¹⁸ Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 128.

good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

Biblical counselor and theologian, Paul David Tripp notes:

... sin renders us incapable of doing what God has ordained us to do. This inability colors every situation and relationship of our lives. It is not just that I don't want to do God's will, or that I think my way is better, it's that even when I have the right intentions, I can't pull it off. I always fall short of God's standard."¹⁹

Scripture is clear that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) and that "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6a). James 2:10 declares, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of them all."

This is why Luther and others point out that the tenth commandment (you shall not covet) made it clear that the law could not be perfectly obeyed because this command is not just an action but an attitude of the heart that no human has been known to keep. The tenth commandment states, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exodus 20:17). Luther says that this command "proves us all to be sinners, for no one can avoid coveting no matter how much he may struggle against it."²⁰ Luther also notes that "... the commandments show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it. They are intended to teach man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and may

¹⁹ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hand* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2002), 15.

²⁰ Martin Luther, *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 282.

despair of his own ability.”²¹ The Scripture, the teaching of theologians and our own experience declare that we cannot perfectly keep the law. And unfortunately, the law does not help us keep the law but it actually insights greater lawlessness in the actions and attitudes of sinful people. This is the second problem with the law.

Because of sin, the law arouses more sin. This problem is clear from experience and from Scripture. Experientially most find that when commanded to “do not,” there is something that instinctively wells up inside that causes them to feel that they must rather than that they must not. For instance, if we are told not to move, we suddenly feel an urge to at least twitch and if we are told not to turn the page suddenly we desire to turn the page. Scripture tells us that it is not the law but actually sin in us that is somehow aroused by the law to commit more sin. So the problem is not explicitly the law but sin interacting with the law and, therefore, it might be said that the law exposes the depth of the problem of sin. Paul says this in Romans 7:5-13:

For while we were in the flesh, *the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law*, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." *But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind;* for apart from the Law sin is dead. I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; *for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.* So then, *the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.* Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by affecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

²¹ Luther, *Three Treatises*, 282.

So, sin is understood through the law. But in light of the sin nature the law has no power to diminish sin but, according to Paul, it actually arouses greater sin. But, as Paul notes, “the Law (is still) holy, and the commandment is (still) holy and righteous and good (verse 12).” In light of our discussion on preaching morality, the problem of the way the law and sin interact must be addressed so that preachers may preach in a way that actually produces life-change rather than arousing more sin. Because the law cannot be kept it can never serve as a path to justification – this is the third problem with the law.

The Law cannot justify man to God. This is Paul’s point in Romans 8:3-4:

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit...

Paul is clearly stating that what the law could not do – deal with sin – Jesus did. The law could never bring about redemption and righteousness in men and women. Hebrews 10:1-12 concurs:

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, O God.’

First he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them’ (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, ‘Here I am, I have come to do your will.’ He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through

the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest (Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

The law cannot “make perfect those who draw near to worship” nor was this ever its intent. Paul states this clearly in Galatians 2:16, 21:

...a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified ... I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

Luther says of verse 16:

So when Paul says, as he often does, that we are not justified by the law, he is speaking generally of the entire law, setting the righteousness of faith against the righteousness of the whole law. The righteousness of the law, he says, does not pronounce us righteous before God; rather, God imputes the righteousness of faith freely through grace, for Christ’s sake. The law, no doubt, is holy, righteous, and good, but people are not justified before God by it.²²

Luther’s point is significant: He is asserting that the law does not save but he is *not* denying that the law is good and should be followed. Scripture is clear that the law was not abolished by Jesus but actually fulfilled in him. Jesus accomplished what the law could not accomplish but he did not establish antinomianism which suggests that because salvation is by faith alone (and it is!) that Christians are under no obligation to obey the moral law. This leads us to our third main point concerning the law.

The Fulfillment of the Law

Jesus says in Matthew 5:17-19:

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not

²² Martin Luther, *Galatians* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998), 86.

the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is not doing away with the law but is actually affirming those who keep and teach the law. This issue of course comes with the problems we addressed above. What do we do when sin keeps us from keeping the law? Certainly, we must acknowledge the biblical tension — sin renders us incapable of perfectly keeping the law and yet Jesus fulfills, upholds and affirms the law. Ultimately, the answer is found in Jesus. Romans 8:3-4a declares: “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

The law was powerless to bring about righteousness in man and freedom from sin so God sent his Son to be the offering so that the “righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us.” Paul too upholds the law. He is saying that the requirements of the law are righteous and cannot be dismissed just because we are incapable of perfectly submitting to the law (8:7b). But, because we are unable to keep this righteous standard Jesus came in our place to fulfill that requirement. So, again, the law is not null and void but its requirement is fulfilled in Jesus’ perfect obedience. Paul also notes that the follower of Christ no longer walks according the flesh but according to the Spirit and thus puts on the display that the power we have to live the obedient life comes from the Spirit of God.

Ultimately, Jesus is the goal and fulfillment of the law and, therefore, Piper suggests four ways in which Jesus' coming changes our experience with the law. Here is a summary of Piper's thoughts:²³

Jesus' coming nullifies the Old Testament ceremonial laws. When Jesus teaches, "whatever goes into a person from the outside cannot defile him" (Mark 7:18) Mark instructs that, "Thus he declared all foods clean" (Mark 7:19).

Jesus in his coming declares that the law is summed up in love. "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). Piper says that in this "Jesus directed us away from a focus on commandments per se and toward a relationship with himself that bears the law-fulfilling fruit of love."²⁴

Jesus' coming now emphasizes that his people will be defined by faith in him. The people of God are no longer defined by "ethnicity or by participation in the theocratic system of kings and priest and judges and all the ceremonial and civic laws that held the system together."²⁵

Jesus' coming put an end to the religious system of priests and temples and sacrifices. The goal of these institutions and rituals was met in Jesus and his life, death and resurrection and therefore they are no longer necessary for a relationship with God.

Jesus' fulfillment of the law leads us to worship because we see that we could never fulfill the law in and of ourselves and that this which we could not do — Jesus did!

²³ Piper, *What Jesus Demands*, 163-164.

²⁴ Piper, *What Jesus Demands*, 163.

²⁵ Piper, *What Jesus Demands*, 164.

Therefore, I now want to consider the beauty of our salvation that is brought about by Christ alone.

Salvation

If we are to preach morality without preaching moralism we must have a biblical understanding of salvation. I will focus primarily on the doctrine of justification but the reality is that to preach morality without preaching moralism our understanding of all of salvation is significant. If our soteriology suggests that there is a way to merit or earn our salvation we will preach moralism. Luther put on display the biblical understanding of justification by faith alone as he launched the Protestant Reformation. He said (reflecting on Romans 10:1), "...since faith alone justifies, it is clear that the inner man cannot be justified, freed, or saved by any outer work or action at all..."²⁶ But, Lovelace suggests that Luther's view can be held and still preached incorrectly. He says,

...justification by faith can be transformed into the wholly unbiblical teaching of justification without sanctification, which Bonhoeffer has called, 'cheap grace.' On the other hand, Puritan and Pietist effort to guard against this abuse often led to an admixture of ascetic legalism in the realm of spiritual discipline . . . Later the shift toward rationalism in parts of the church began to obscure the holiness of God and the depth of sin, introducing a moralism which found no use at all for the doctrine of justification. These three aberrations from the biblical teaching on justification—cheap grace, legalism, and moralism—still dominate the church today.²⁷

What can also be confusing today is that Christian preachers often appear to be preaching the same thing as proponents of other religions. Just like Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Jews all have certain moral absolutes and it is therefore crucial that Christians are clear about their unique understanding of salvation and what justifies them to God.

²⁶ Martin Luther, *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 280.

²⁷ Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1979), 100.

Keller says, "...when we ask, 'why be moral?' the other systems say, 'In order to find God,' while Christianity says, 'Because God has found you.' The Christian gospel is that we are not saved by moral living, we are saved for it. We are saved by grace alone, but that grace will inevitably issue in a moral life."²⁸

This is what Paul presented in Ephesians 2:1-10 where he announces that salvation is not by works but by grace and that "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for* good works . . . (Ephesians 2:10). Preachers must always make sure that they do not put the metaphorical cart before the horse. Always, salvation comes first and what follows is a changed life that *then* produces good works. This order is critical to avoiding moralism and this is why a biblical understanding of justification and an understanding of the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*) is crucial to this thesis.

Justification

Justification is just one image given in the Scripture for salvation. John R.W. Stott points out that the images include: *propitiation* (God's wrath being appeased by the sacrificial death of Christ for sin); *redemption* (the blood and sacrifice of Christ paying the price to purchase our rescue from sin); *reconciliation* (that the cross ultimately reconciles us to God) and, the image we are focusing upon—*justification* (the gracious gift through Christ of a right standing with God).²⁹

Justification can be understood according to Lovelace as "the acceptance of believers as righteous in the sight of God through the righteousness of Jesus Christ

²⁸ Timothy Keller, "Preaching Morality in an Amoral Age," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, eds. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 169.

²⁹ John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 167-192.

accounted to them.”³⁰ Theologian Anthony A. Hoekema gives this definition of justification: “The gracious and judicial act of God whereby he declares believing sinners righteous on the basis of the righteousness of Christ which is credited to them, forgives all their sins, adopts them as children, and gives them the right to eternal life.”³¹

All of these definitions highlight justification as a gift of grace rather than a merited favor. When Hoekema defines justification as a “judicial act” he is emphasizing the legal aspect of our salvation. He points out that, except for one place in Daniel, the word *justify* “is always used in a forensic or legal sense, as meaning, not ‘to make righteous,’ but ‘to declare judicially that one is in harmony with the law.’”³² This judicial word assumes God’s wrath and that there is a consequence for sin as Paul states in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, *but* the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.” The punishment is death and the free gift is life. This free gift is our justification and what theologians call *imputed* righteousness. Imputed righteousness means that we are *declared* righteous rather than earning our righteousness. Grudem says, “It is essential to the heart of the gospel to insist that God declares us to be just or righteous not on the basis of our actual condition of righteousness or holiness, but rather on the basis of Christ’s perfect righteousness, which he thinks of as belonging to us.”³³ This understanding of imputed righteousness — a declared righteousness — helps us to understand how it is that we can be loved, accepted and approved by God even when our lives do not align perfectly with his holiness. It is because we are declared righteous that

³⁰ Lovelace, *Dynamics*, 98.

³¹ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 172.

³² Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 154.

³³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 727.

we can accept his acceptance and live lives that reflect the axiom, “I am approved by God, therefore I obey” rather than trying to obey so that we can then be approved.

Paul is adamant to present that justification is a gift and a result of faith (not works) in Galatians 2:16, 21:

Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified . . . I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.

Christ’s death (along with his life and resurrection) is the provision for our righteousness. This truth was stunning to Paul the Pharisee who had believed that it was up to him to produce his own righteousness. In Philippians 3, Paul proclaims his passion for Jesus and declares that his righteousness does not come from his own effort or pedigree or position or the law. He says, “(I don’t have) a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith...” (Philippians 3:9).

Scripture points to a justification by faith alone. Even the Old Testament speaks of Abraham being justified by his faith. Genesis 15:6 tells us that Abraham believed in the Lord and God “reckoned it to him as righteousness.” This is the same concept at imputed righteousness. Abraham did not earn his righteousness but he was declared righteous — it was reckoned to him. So, righteousness is given to us by God’s gracious declaration. But, the Catholic tradition sees this differently. Hoekema explains, saying, “In Roman Catholic theology according to Trent, justification is thought of primarily as an infusion of grace which results in a change in man’s spiritual and moral nature, rather

than as a declarative act, in which God imputes the righteousness of Christ to the believer.”³⁴

The emphasis in the Catholic tradition is that salvation is not based on grace alone but also involves some kind of merit. Many who hold to this view find evidence for it in James 2:24 that says “You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.” This verse seems to be in direct conflict with Paul’s statement in Romans 3:28: “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.” But, these authors are not in conflict and to understand this it is crucial to understand their particular audience and emphasis. Paul is addressing people who believed that they could trust in keeping the law for salvation while James is addressing those who believed that a mere intellectual assent to the beliefs of Christianity was enough for salvation. Hoekema states that James is not opposed to Paul but is stating that our justification, which is based on faith alone, is proven or shown through our works. He says:

The point James is making is that “faith was completed (eteleiothe, ‘brought to its goal’) by works” (James 2:22); that, in other words, the deed of offering up Isaac revealed that faith by which Abraham had been justified was a living faith. This deed showed Abraham’s justification was genuine. I suggest therefore, that we understand *dikaioo* in James to mean: ‘to be revealed as justified.’³⁵

This is what John Calvin was saying in his famous dictum that we are saved by faith alone but the faith that saves is never alone — for it is always followed by good works. This is also what Paul is saying in Ephesians 2:10 when he declares that “we (those who are saved by grace and not by works) are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” In the

³⁴ Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 163.

³⁵ Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 162.

context of Ephesians 2, Paul is saying your good works have not saved you but that your salvation will produce good works.

Again, this is why the order of our salvation is significant. The true gospel presents a salvation by grace through faith alone that precedes a life change that produces good works.

Faith and Salvation

Some of the events of salvation may happen simultaneously rather than in a purely chronological order but I believe regeneration always precedes faith, conversion, repentance, justification, sanctification and the perseverance of the true believer. This is significant because when we speak of salvation by grace through faith alone we need to understand how one comes to faith and how to avoid expressing faith as a type of work. I believe that confusion is created in how a person views depravity and faith. This debate is central to the differing views of Arminianism and Calvinism.

For the Arminian, people are depraved but not so depraved that they cannot choose faith in Jesus Christ; they believe in “prevenient grace”—God gives all the ability to choose and then to be granted salvation. But, Calvinism responded to Arminianism by stating that people are utterly and thoroughly depraved and therefore incapable of faith apart from the miraculous intervention of God. This is where regeneration is seen as coming before and actually enabling faith. In the five points of Calvinism this is referred to as “irresistible grace.” J.I. Packer describes irresistible grace as “the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing men to faith (that) never fails to achieve its object (of salvation).”³⁶

³⁶ J.I. Packer, *J. I. Packer's introduction to a 1958 reprint of John Owen's: The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (London: Banner of Truth), available from: http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/packer_intro.html; (accessed 14 August 2009).

This aligns with Hoekema's definition of regeneration: "...that work of the Holy Spirit whereby he initially brings persons into living union with Christ, changing their hearts so that they who are spiritually dead become spiritually alive, now able and willing to repent of sin, believe the gospel, and serve the Lord."³⁷

I believe that this is what Jesus is talking about in John 3 when he tells Nicodemus that "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v. 3). It is a work of the Spirit that brings about belief in the mind and heart of men and women. Jesus alludes to this in saying that "the wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born again" (v. 8). The ability to believe in Jesus and receive eternal life (v. 15) is given by a gift and movement of the Holy Spirit. This understanding depends heavily on an understanding of depravity as total, complete and rendering people incapable of right thinking about God. Paul quotes the Psalms in declaring, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one" (Romans 3:10-12). He also states in Ephesians 2:1: "You were dead in your trespasses and sin."

It is this state of "deadness" that is often debated. A simple illustration can be helpful in understanding the different views. Arminians views the invitation to salvation in this way: Imagine that a woman is caught in a horrific current that will take her over a waterfall and to a certain death if she is not rescued. On the shore, a man throws her a life preserver and calls for her to grab hold. It is then up to the woman to have the "faith" to

³⁷ Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 94.

reach out and grab/trust the life preserver for her salvation. This is her choice and she can either receive it or reject it. Obviously, this position puts the emphasis on the woman's decision to grab hold of her salvation and trust the life preserver. But, the Reformed view paints a different picture. In their illustration the woman is dead on the bottom of the river and incapable of grabbing hold of anything or helping herself in anyway. So, the man on the riverbank jumps in with the life preserver, dives to the bottom of the river, wraps the life preserver around the woman, brings her to the surface and ultimately resuscitates her. In this telling of the story the emphasis is upon the woman's complete inability to choose the rescue and the gracious and courageous act of the one who rescues her.

The first illustration says that she made the right choice (an act of faith in the life preserver) and was then saved. The second illustration shows that she was incapable of that act of faith and first had to be rescued to receive the gift of faith.

I have spent a significant amount of time on this issue because I believe that it is crucial to the preaching of morality and the gospel of grace. If men and women are capable of a decision of faith apart from the intervention of the Holy Spirit then faith can be perceived as a work (whether this is the intent of the communicator or not). Grudem argues for this understanding of the relationship between regeneration, faith and salvation:

...regeneration (is) the act of God awakening spiritual life within us, bringing us from spiritual *death* to spiritual *life*. On this definition, it is natural to understand that regeneration comes before saving faith. It is in fact this work of God that gives us the spiritual *ability* to respond to God in faith. However, when we say that it comes "before" saving faith, it is important to remember that they usually come so close together that it will ordinarily seem to us that they are happening at

the same time. As God addresses the effective call of the gospel to us, he regenerates us and we respond in faith and repentance to his call.³⁸

I do not think it can be overstated that our understanding of regeneration and salvation is absolutely crucial to how we preach the gospel. Some are not concerned with the differences between the Arminian and Reformed positions and believe that in the end they ultimately lead to the same conclusion — salvation by grace through faith. But, the differences are significant and will affect preaching. Packer says this about the Arminianism/Calvinism debate in light of the content of our message:

The difference between (Arminianism and Calvinism) is not primarily one of emphasis, but of content. One proclaims a God who saves; the other speaks of a God who enables man to save himself . . . The two theologies thus conceive the plan of salvation in quite different terms. One makes salvation depend on the work of God, the other on a work of man; one regards faith as part of God's gift of salvation, the other as man's own contribution to salvation; one gives all the glory of saving believers to God, the other divides the praise between God, who, so to speak, built the machinery of salvation, and man, who by believing operated it. Plainly, these differences are important...³⁹

And for our purposes they are incredibly important because our beliefs shape our preaching and our preaching shapes the thinking of our congregations which in turns shapes how they live and worship and love.

The Implications of Soteriology on Preaching

In summary, how we think about soteriology will come out in the way we preach. If we believe that salvation is dependent upon human effort to make a right choice of faith in God, then we will emphasize man's choice and ability to choose or reject God. If we believe that man is incapable of making this choice of faith apart from the miraculous and gracious intervention of God, then we will emphasize the sovereignty, mercy, grace

³⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 702.

³⁹ Packer, *Introduction*, 4.

and persistence of God and the depravity of man. This does not mean that preachers will not call their listeners to repent and believe in Christ. They will and they should. But they will preach this message with confidence in the power of the Spirit to make this possible in the lives of their listeners. Certainly, our soteriology shapes the content of our preaching just as all theology shapes preaching. For this reason I will now consider the doctrine of sanctification.

Sanctification

I have emphasized above that it is crucial for the preacher to preach a clear doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone if he is to avoid preaching moralism. The same is true when preaching sanctification. Often what is heard in the pew (whether it is the intent of the preacher or not) is that a person is saved by grace but sanctified by self-effort. I believe that we are both saved and sanctified by grace. This does not mean that people are completely passive in either process but the order in sanctification is just as crucial as the order discussed in salvation. God's work is first and then followed by the God-empowered response of men and women. A biblical understanding of sanctification is crucial to preaching morality without preaching moralism because preaching sanctification as only the self-effort of men and women will undoubtedly lead to moralistic living.

I will present here a definition of sanctification and then address the significance of definitive *and* progressive sanctification to this thesis. After addressing the definitions I will present the emphasis in Scripture upon the work of God and then the work of men and women in sanctification. Finally, I will briefly consider the implications of my conclusions upon preaching morality without preaching moralism.

Definition of Sanctification

Sanctification is defined in a multitude of ways by theologians. Grudem says, “Sanctification is a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.”⁴⁰ This definition is simple and clear and notes the work of God and men and women, but is perhaps too simple. Hoekema gives a more robust definition by stating that sanctification is “...that gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, involving our responsible participation, by which he delivers us from the pollution of sin, renews our entire nature according to the image of God, and enables us to live lives that are pleasing to him.”⁴¹ Hoekema puts a stronger emphasis on the work of God but also notes that there is an enabling that makes it possible for men and women to live differently.

David Peterson, however, finds Hoekema’s definition (and I would infer Grudem’s as well) inadequate suggesting that it “obscures the distinctive meaning and value of the terminology in the New Testament, confusing sanctification with renewal and transformation.”⁴² Peterson is concerned that too many definitions of sanctification put the emphasis on its progressive nature and miss the Biblical use of the word. He agrees that there is an aspect of sanctification that is a process but suggests that there needs to be greater (or at least equal) emphasis put on the definitive nature of sanctification. He emphasizes that sanctification is a one-time event as well as a process

⁴⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 746.

⁴¹ Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 192.

⁴² David Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 13.

and that the Scripture actually puts greater emphasis on the definitive act of sanctification. Peterson says this about the Biblical use of sanctification:

In the New Testament (sanctification) primarily refers to God's way of taking possession of us in Christ, setting us apart to belong to him and to fulfill his purposes for us. Sanctification certainly has present and ongoing effects, but when the verb 'to sanctify' (Gk. *hagiazerein*) and the noun 'sanctification' (Gk. *hagiasmos*) are used, the emphasis is regularly on the saving work of God in Christ, applied to believers through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. . . Ritual consecration to God, which is such a prominent feature of the Mosaic law, is replaced by the consecrating work of Jesus in his death and resurrection. Believers are definitively consecrated to God in order to live dedicated and holy lives, to his glory.⁴³

Peterson argues strongly and convincingly for the definitive aspect of sanctification and that it is very closely tied to justification. He does not suggest that it has nothing to do with the on-going work of holiness in the believer's life but he wants to first emphasize the work of God that is then followed by the cooperation of men and women. And, yet again, order matters: God's work must be emphasized as the first and foremost work that then allows for people to be able to live lives of discipline and holiness.

Scripture on Sanctification

Holiness is at the heart of sanctification. It can be said that sanctification is the work of God by which he makes us holy. The word, "sanctify", means "to make holy." God is holy, meaning that he is sacred and set apart. In Leviticus 19:2, God declares, "... You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." We are made in the image of God. To be in the image of God is to be like him and to be like him is to be holy. We too are to be a sacred people, set apart for and to God. As Jesus prays for his followers he acknowledges that they are not of the world as he is not of the world and then he asks the

⁴³ Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 27.

Father to “sanctify them in the truth...” (John 17:17). Jesus is asking the Father to make his followers holy (set apart) and to do the work of sanctification in their life. Scripture affirms that the Triune God is active in the work of sanctification. Paul declares in Romans 6:22 that God’s work of salvation brings about our sanctification (“But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.”). Alluding to the now and not-yet nature (as well as the definitive and progressive nature) of sanctification Paul prays in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

God the Son also plays a role in bringing about our sanctification. In Ephesians 5:25-27 Paul tells us that Jesus “loved the church and gave himself up for her, so that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.”

Paul’s emphasis here is on the work of Jesus to bring about purification in the life of the church and that this purification will result in a church that is holy and blameless. The author of Hebrews notes that Jesus suffered, “that he might sanctify the people through his own blood” (13:12). And most profoundly we are told by Paul that Jesus did not just participate in bringing about our sanctification but that he actually became our sanctification. “But by his doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Not only did God, the Father and God, the Son bring about our sanctification but also God, the Holy Spirit. Paul tells the Thessalonians that he is thankful for them because “God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit...” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Peter tells the followers of Jesus that they were chosen to obey Jesus according to the foreknowledge of God and “by the sanctifying work of the Spirit” (1 Peter 1:2).

Clearly, sanctification is a work of God but it is also apparent in Scripture that men and women participate in this work. I emphasize the work of God first because as mentioned repeatedly — order matters. When the order is reversed (emphasizing the work of people before the work of God) the tendency is to hear that sanctification is a work to gain the approval or favor of God. The reverse order could wrongly be interpreted by the listener as suggesting that men and women must first work to get God to work or to gain God’s favor. But the reality of the gospel — whether applying it to justification or sanctification — is that the only way people can make a lasting and transforming effort in their life with God is because God *first* did his work and made it possible for men and women to do theirs.

But again, let it be clear that the Scripture *does* exhort men and women to participate in their sanctification. Paul commands in Romans 6:19b, “...present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.” Hebrews 12:14 says to pursue peace with all men as well as “sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.” And Peter in 1 Peter 1:15-16 says, “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” And as I mentioned in the section on the law, the bible is abounding with moral imperatives and calls believers

to exert Spirit-empowered effort in living a life in Christ. Take these passages for example:

Ephesians 4:31-32: “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

Hebrews 13:4-5: “Let the marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have...”

Romans 6:12-13: “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

These verses are only a few of the many in Scripture that command believers to live differently. It is clear from these and the many verses like them that the Bible does not call us to a passive spirituality. We are called to actively participate in the work that God began in our justification and in our definitive sanctification. This work is the part of sanctification that is progressive in nature but still initiated and made possible by the continuing work of the Triune God.

Two passages speak clearly to the tension we see in Scripture between God’s work and our work in our spiritual growth: Philippians 2:12b-13 and Ephesians 2:8-10.

First, in Philippians Paul says, “...work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” Paul is certainly commanding his readers to exert effort, to do a work, but he is

also reminding them that the reason they are able to do this work is because God is first at work in them.

Secondly, in Ephesians 2:8-10 we hear Paul speaking again to the work of God and the work of men and women. He says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

In this passage, Paul affirms that we were saved by grace but then he adds that this saving grace is meant to propel us toward what we were initially created for — to be an expression of God (“his workmanship”) and “to do good works.” It is significant that Paul is suggesting that even these good works are by grace, for God prepared them from the very beginning and now we just need to “walk in them.”

What is clear is that God intends for his followers to look different. This was true in the Old Testament and the New Testament as well. In Leviticus and in 1 Peter we hear the call to be holy just as God is holy. The Christian life is a life of transformation. In Ephesians 4:1 Paul implores believers to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called...” And John declares in 1 John 2:5b-6, “By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”

The Implications of Sanctification on Preaching

If the Christian life is about salvation by grace through faith alone and also about a life of transformation then the preacher must preach the totality of this message. But, this elicits many questions: If sanctification is definitive *and* progressive how do we

preach its progressive nature in a way that avoids moralism? If there is a part that God does and a part that we do — how do we preach this without being moralistic? How do we preach a message that upholds the grace, the sovereignty and the power of God and also call believers in Christ to exert effort in their pursuit of holiness and relationship with the God? Richard Foster says:

The opposite of grace is works, not effort. "Works" have to do with earning, and there simply is nothing any of us can do to earn God's love or acceptance. And, of course, we don't have to. God already loves us utterly and perfectly, and our complete acceptance is the free gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. . . But, if we ever hope to "grow in grace," we will find ourselves engaging in effort of the most strenuous kind.⁴⁴

We cannot preach earning, but we can preach effort. God is not opposed to effort but he is opposed to earning (Ephesians 2:1-10). I hate to sound redundant, but I must. Our theology matters — what we believe about sanctification matters! And order matters — if we put the cart (the effort of men and women) before the horse (the power of God) we will preach moralism whether that is our intent or not.

As mentioned above, Philippians 2:12b-13 and Ephesians 2:8-10 are incredibly helpful for the preacher to have in mind when considering how to preach for transformation in the life of the believer while upholding the grace and initiative of God. People do have a part to play in the progressive nature of their sanctification and this must be preached but always in the correct order.

The preceding discussions of justification and sanctification lead to another question that is pertinent to this thesis: what is the biblical and theological purpose of preaching? Is preaching primarily to bring about change in the listener? Is it to introduce

⁴⁴ Richard J. Foster and Kathryn A. Helmers, *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 19.

the non-believer to faith in Jesus? Is it only to elicit worship? I will consider a right biblical and theological understanding of preaching in the next section.

Preaching

If we are to preach morality without preaching moralism we need a biblical and theological understanding of preaching. I will consider what the Bible says about preaching, what scholars add to this discussion and the convictions I believe every preacher should hold in relationship to preaching. Then I will briefly consider the implications of the theology of preaching upon this thesis. In chapter three, the literature review, I will evaluate in greater depth writings on the subject of preaching, their practical application in the pulpit and how they suggest addressing life-change and morality from the pulpit.

What the Bible says about Preaching

Over 117 times some form of the word “preach” appears on the pages of the New American Standard version of the Bible. Beyond the mere use of the word we see the concept of preaching appear as prophets *preach* by proclaiming news of God’s wrath, God’s grace, the impending “day of the Lord”, etc. Most often the context around the word *preaching* reveals the idea of proclamation. Whether it is Solomon announcing that all is vanity (Ecclesiastes 1:2b), John the Baptist commanding his listener to repent (Matthew 3:2), or Jesus declaring “release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind” (Luke 4:18b) — throughout the Bible, preaching is associated with proclamation. Harper’s Bible Dictionary explains:

In the New Testament, preaching is explicitly or implicitly conveyed by many terms. The two most commonly used are the word from which we get ‘evangelize,’ meaning ‘to announce good news’ or ‘to preach the gospel’ (Matt. 11:5; Rom. 1:15), a term that carries within it both mode and content, and the

word meaning ‘to herald’ or ‘to make an authoritative proclamation’ (Matt. 3:1; Acts 10:42; 2 Cor. 4:5).⁴⁵

The message of preaching in the Bible (from the Prophets to John the Baptist to Jesus to the Apostles) is always the message of God. In the New Testament the message is most often associated with proclaiming the following themes:

The kingdom of God/heaven (Matthew 3:2, 4:17, 10:7, 24:14; Luke 4:43, 8:1, 16:16; Acts 8:12, 20:25, 28:31).

The gospel (Matthew 26:13; Mark 1:14, 13:10, 14:9, 16:5; Luke 3:18, 4:18, 7:22, 9:6, 16:16, 20:1; Acts 8:12, 8:25, 8:40, 13:32, 14:7, 14:15, 14:21, 16:10; Romans 1:9, 1:15, 10:15, 15:19; 15:20; 1 Corinthians 1:17, 9:16, 9:18, 15:1; 2 Corinthians 10:16, 11:7; Galatians 1:8-9, 1:11, 3:8, 4:13; Philippians 4:15; 1 Peter 1:12; Revelation 14:6).

Jesus Christ (Acts 5:42, 8:12, 8:35, 10:36, 10:42, 11:20, 17:18, 19: 13, 28:31; Romans 15:19, 16:25; 1 Corinthians 1:23, 15:12; 2 Corinthians 1:19, 4:5, 11:4; Galatians 1:16; Ephesians 3:8).

It is interesting to note that after Jesus’ ascension the emphasis is focused almost entirely upon Jesus. The language of “kingdom” seems to now be defined in the person of Christ for it is *his* kingdom and he *is* the kingdom (Matthew 3:2; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 1:13; 2 Timothy 4:1; 2 Peter 1:11). So, the message preached is a message of the gospel centered upon Jesus Christ.

Because one of the common words used for preaching in the New Testament is the word from which we derive the term “evangelize” there are those who suggest that preaching in Scripture is primarily an act of evangelism. Many of the sermons in Acts

⁴⁵ Paul J. Achtemeier, Publishers Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, Includes Index, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 818.

are of an evangelistic nature, calling for repentance and conversion. But, to limit preaching to merely an act of evangelism is too narrow. The book of Acts is set in a unique time when the early Church is being formed and the emphasis of this record is to show how the church grew — and preaching certainly played a significant role in this growth.

I believe preaching is an act of evangelism *and* discipleship. Paul exhorts Timothy to “preach the word” (2 Timothy 4:2) right after he reminds him that “*All* Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). In this context it seems that Paul is saying that the word of God is for the equipping of the believer and that this word (all of Scripture) must be preached. Paul will also go on to call Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5). This suggests that Paul believes that ministry involves both the equipping of the church and the evangelization of the lost.

Evangelicals have often made an un-helpful distinction between evangelism and discipleship. We suggest that the gospel is necessary for salvation but not for growth as a believer. Scripture, however, shows that even believers need to continually hear and grow in their understanding of the gospel. Peter says that if believers are not showing spiritual growth one of the reasons is that they have forgotten the message of the gospel, that they have already been purified from their former sins (2 Peter 1:1-15). Paul writes his letter to the churches in Galatia out of concern that they are abandoning the true gospel (Galatians 1:6-10).

If the content of preaching is the Scripture, what is the biblical form for teaching? Unfortunately, the Bible never explicitly says how a sermon is to be preached or the form that it should take. Helpful insight, however, was initiated by the study of C.H. Dodd and then later expanded. Dodd compared the early speeches in Acts with the pre-Pauline creedal fragments in Paul's epistles. The New Bible Dictionary explains:

Following (Dodd's) approach but interpreting the data with a slightly different emphasis, we find that the apostolic message was 'a proclamation of the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus that led to an evaluation of His person as both Lord and Christ, confronted man with the necessity of repentance, and promised the forgiveness of sins' (R. H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching*, 1960, p. 84).⁴⁶

Ultimately, every sermon is to be a message about God and more specifically a message about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Morality must be preached along with an exhortation to life-change but this must be preached upon the foundation of the gospel. Paul declared this priority saying, "...woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16). When proclaiming the testimony of God, Paul said that he "determined to know nothing among (his listeners) except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Preaching appears to be one of God's primary vehicles for disseminating this message. Paul, declaring the gospel in Romans, asks, "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14). Preaching is a significant and sacred work. It was the work of Jesus (Mark 1:38) and it was a work to which he called his followers (Mark 3:14). Jesus demanded that the gospel "be preached to all the nations" (Mark 13:10) and "to all creation" (Mark 16:15). In summary, the priority of

⁴⁶D. R. W. Wood, *New Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton: InterVarsity, 1996, c1982, c1962), 951.

preaching is clear in the Scripture and the substance of its message is centered upon the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A Theology of Preaching

Every preacher needs a theology of preaching. There are things within the church that can be done out of tradition rather than theological reflection and conviction.

Preaching can be one of these things and when it is it can lead to the abandonment of preaching the very word of God. Consider this “conversation” on an emergent church’s blog:⁴⁷

The blogger asks:

Does your community do 'preaching'? If so, what does it look like from week to week? In what ways is preaching changing shape in the church today?

Comments:

We don't do "preaching" although we will have a key leader prepare and facilitate a discussion or lead a meditation or whatever.

dan » 7 July, 2003 1:52 PM

We're not planning to have any preaching as such... We're planning to avoid the sermon format....

Justin Baeder » 8 July, 2003 3:32 PM

My preaching, since I allowed myself to become an emerging pastor, has changed significantly. The 3-point expository sermon has been replaced with an intimate time of storytelling.

kevin » 8 July, 2003 5:11 PM

We have hardly had any preaching at grace for the last 3 years - haven't missed it!

jonny » 8 July, 2003 6:27 PM

⁴⁷ Rowse, Darren, “The Living Room: A Space for Life,” Blog entry posted 7 July 2003. http://www.livingroom.org.au/blog/archives/preaching_the__emerging_church_way.php (accessed September 10, 2009).

This conversation and others like it are troubling. Perhaps the problem is that before we can talk about style in preaching we must first determine a theology of preaching followed by personal convictions about preaching. Stott puts it this way:

In a world which seems either unwilling or unable to listen, how can we be persuaded to go on preaching, and learn to do so effectively? The essential secret is not mastering certain techniques but being mastered by certain convictions. In other words, theology is more important than methodology. . . . Technique can only make us orators; if we want to be preachers, theology is what we need. If our theology is right, then we have all the basic insights we need into what we ought to be doing, and all the incentives we need to induce us to do it faithfully.⁴⁸

I believe the following theological convictions are essential to God-exalting and God-honoring preaching: (1) The Bible is the inerrant, powerful, relevant, life-changing word of God; (2) Biblical preaching is expository preaching; and (3) Jesus is the ultimate focus of all preaching (that believing in him and following him really matters). I will consider each of these convictions individually.

The Bible is the inerrant, powerful, relevant, life-changing word of God

What I believe about the Bible is central to how and what I preach. If I am not utterly committed to the Bible as the true word of God I will be tempted to disregard it or simply use its text as a springboard to pontificate my own opinions and pet-peeves. But, personal opinion is not what I am called to preach. Again, Paul exhorted Timothy to preach not from personal agenda but from the very word of God (2 Timothy 4:2). Stott notes, "It is certain that we cannot handle Scripture adequately in the pulpit if our doctrine of Scripture is inadequate."⁴⁹ I believe this is why it is crucial to hold to the inerrancy of Scripture.

⁴⁸ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 92.

⁴⁹ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 99.

I also believe that a commitment to the Bible as a powerful, relevant, life-changing book is crucial to preaching. Scripture is powerful, relevant and life-changing because it points to the triune-God who is powerful, relevant and life-changing. “Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, (Jesus) explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 4:27). Acts tells us that Apollos used the Scripture to prove that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 18:28). It is the Bible, through the power of the Spirit that leads to a right understanding of God so that we can believe and follow him. *All* of the Bible is “inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The preacher must believe the Scripture is powerful, “living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). If the preacher does not hold to this conviction he or she will be tempted to manufacture a sense of false-guilt and shame in her congregation rather than allowing the word to do a work in conjunction with the Spirit that leads to lasting life-change.

It is also important for the preacher to believe that the Scripture is relevant and that part of his or her job is to show this relevancy. If a preacher does not hold this conviction he or she will be tempted to think they must *make* the Bible relevant and veer from preaching the actual word of God. If the preacher knows the Bible to be relevant then he or she will simply seek to be a bridge-builder between the biblical canon and the congregation. “A true sermon,” says Stott, “bridges the gulf between the biblical and the

modern worlds, and must be equally earthed in both.”⁵⁰ If the preacher holds to this conviction he or she will be diligent to understand the true meaning of the text and connect that meaning to the current culture and context.

The Bible is more than a rule book for living. It is the very word of God displaying the greatest story ever told. Ultimately, the Bible (from Genesis to Revelation) is the true story of a grand rescue. It is the story of a triune God who created men and women who chose to rebel and take on the very nature of sin. It is the story of how this God came after these men and women to forgive them and redeem them for all eternity through the life, death and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ. If the preacher believes that most importantly the Bible puts this story on display he or she will preach gospel-saturated, God-exalting, Jesus-centered sermons. But, if he or she sees the bible as primarily a guide book he or she will merely preach moralism and self-help sermons that present God merely as a means to a better life rather than God as the ultimate aim and end of all things.

Biblical preaching is expository preaching

“Expository preaching is a *necessary* corollary of the doctrine of the God-breathed nature of Scripture,” says Derek Thomas. “The preacher is to make God’s word known and make it understandable. He is to limit himself to it without adding or subtracting.”⁵¹ If a preacher is committed to the Scripture, he or she must be committed to expository preaching. By this I do not mean merely preaching through a passage verse-by-verse. Sidney Greidanus explains, “Expository preaching, as its name implies, is to

⁵⁰ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 10.

⁵¹ Derek Thomas, “Expository Preaching: Keeping Your Eye on the Text,” in *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002), 63.

expose, to lay open, the meaning of the preaching-text in its contexts.”⁵² At the heart of expository preaching is not just the method in the pulpit but the commitment in the study. Expository preaching is first and foremost committed to accurate handling of the text.

Stott contends that expository preaching is true Christian preaching and defines it this way:

To expound Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view. The expositor pries open what appears to be closed, makes plain what is obscure, unravels what is knotted and unfolds what is tightly packed. The opposite of exposition is ‘imposition’, which is to impose on the text what is not there.⁵³

If a preacher is not convinced of the value of expository preaching he or she will be tempted to use the text for his or her own agenda rather than allowing the text to set the agenda. I contend that preachers must be committed to expository preaching if they are to preach with biblical and theological integrity.

Jesus is the ultimate focus of all preaching

Let me break this conviction into two parts. The first is the conviction that Christ must always be preached. The second is that the preacher must believe passionately that faith in Jesus and following him is absolutely crucial.

First, the conviction that Christ must always be preached is debated among evangelicals and those committed to expository preaching. There are those who say that preaching should always exalt God but that this does not necessarily mean that Jesus must be named. Those holding to this opinion will often point to the authorial intent of much of the Old Testament when the name of Jesus was not on the mind of the writer.

⁵² Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 231.

⁵³ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 125-126.

But, I believe that in our current context (where the canon is closed and we have both the Old and New Testaments) we cannot read passages of the Bible in isolation, without regard for the entire context. Once you know the end of the story you can never read the beginning the same. To suggest that someone who has completed the Harry Potter Series can ever go back and read book one as if they have never read book seven is absurd and unhelpful. Nor would it be right to read Genesis the same now that we hold the New Testament in our hand. Many see the Old Testament as helpful in interpreting the New Testament. I contend that the New Testament is now essential in interpreting the Old Testament. I agree with Graeme Goldsworthy who said:

...the soundest methodological starting point for doing theology is the gospel since the person of Jesus is set forth as the final and fullest expression of God's revelation of his kingdom. Jesus is the goal and fulfillment of the whole Old Testament, and, as the embodiment of the truth of God, he is the interpretative key to the Bible.⁵⁴

Scripture also speaks of Jesus as the culmination of the gospel story:

God, after he spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in his son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he made the world. And he is the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his nature, and upholds all things by the word of his power. When he had made purification of sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:1-3).

No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he (Jesus) has explained him (John 1:18).

Jesus said... 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9).

Greidanus notes, "The conviction that Jesus inaugurated the messianic age enables the New Testament writers to preach Christ from the Old Testament, for this presupposition

⁵⁴ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 33.

means that God's redemptive history reaches its climax in Jesus."⁵⁵ This conviction also allows the modern-day preacher to preach Jesus from the Old Testament.

Note: This does not mean that Jesus is preached outside of an understanding of the Trinity. Of course, Jesus is known as the second person of the Trinity and to preach a biblical understanding of the godhead a preacher will not neglect God, the Father or God, the Holy Spirit.

The second conviction is that the preacher must believe passionately that faith in Jesus and following him is absolutely crucial. This conviction gets at the emphasis and unction that must be displayed in the pulpit. If the preacher is personally convinced of the significance and necessity of personal faith in Christ and a growing followership of him then the preacher will bring this to their preaching. The preacher must believe that this matters for him or her and for those who listen. Again, this is where a preacher's theology comes into play. Clear conviction of the gospel helps a preacher avoid the motivation of shame and guilt and instead lean into dependency upon the Holy Spirit who brings about salvation (John 3).

Implications of the Theology of Preaching on this Thesis

What a preacher believes about preaching will shape his or her sermon and will affect how he or she preaches morality. If the preacher is to avoid preaching moralistically he or she must believe that the task of the expository preacher is to preach the moral imperatives in Scripture within the context of the entire biblical story of redemption. I will explore how this is practically applied by exemplars in the field of preaching in the next chapter as I review their writings on this topic.

⁵⁵ Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 196.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this thesis is to discover how to preach morality without preaching moralism to young adults. In the preceding chapter I explored Biblical and theological issues crucial to this topic: definitions of morality, the law, salvation, sanctification and preaching. In this chapter, I will explore some of the literature pertaining to this thesis, most specifically in the areas of: (1) the purpose of preaching; (2) preaching styles and models; (3) applying the text in preaching; and (4) preaching moral imperatives and avoiding moralism.

Books and articles on preaching fill stores and websites and are too numerous to count, therefore, I will primarily focus on the writings of four contemporary preachers from two differing camps of preaching. I will also quote from the writings of those who agree or disagree with their conclusions. The two camps will be referred to as the “Christ-centered preaching” camp (represented by Bryan Chapell and Tim Keller) and the “preaching for change” camp (represented by Andy Stanley and Rick Warren). It is important to note that all of these men are evangelical and hold to a priority of expository preaching.

The Purpose of Preaching

A preacher’s understanding of why he or she preaches is crucial because it shapes their style of preaching, their emphasis in preaching and their application of the text. I have divided the exemplars mentioned above into the two camps because they differ in what they emphasize as the ultimate aim of preaching. Keller and Chapel emphasize the exaltation of Christ and clear communication of the gospel while Stanley and Warren

emphasize life change. All four would agree that Christ should be exalted in preaching and that life-change is important but of interest to this thesis is their primary emphasis and how this effects their preaching.

Stanley states his intent clearly in his book, *Communicating for a Change*. He says, "In short, my goal is change. I want (the listener) to do something different instead of just think about it."¹ Warren shares a similar sentiment in his book, *The Purpose*

Driven Church:

When I go to a doctor, I don't want to just hear what's wrong with me; I want him or her to give me some specific steps to getting better. What people need today are fewer "ought-to" sermons and more "how-to" sermons. . . The deepest kind of teaching is that which makes a difference in people's day-to-day lives. As D.L. Moody once said, "The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives." Our goal is Christlike character.²

While Keller would agree that life-change is important he insists that the ultimate goal of preaching is to "lift up Christ." He says, "there is just one goal for a sermon—lift up Christ and his salvation."³ Chapell in his book, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, agrees with Keller. He quotes from an essay by Thomas F. Jones who wrote: "True Christian preaching must center on the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross is the central doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. . . The one who is called to preach, therefore, must preach Christ

¹ Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, *Communicating for a Change* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2006), 95.

² Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 229.

³ Timothy J. Keller, *Preaching the Gospel in a Post-Modern World* [lecture notes on-line] (Reformed Theological Seminary; Doctor of Ministry Program, January 2002), available from <http://hendersonhome.com/Keller/keller-on-preaching-syllabus.pdf>; (accessed October 9, 2009).

because there is no other message from God.”⁴ Chapell argues this point from the teachings of Paul and of Jesus, saying:

These words are not hyperbole, but rather reflect the ethic of the apostle Paul who wrote to the Corinthians, “[A]s I proclaimed to you the testimony about God . . . I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:1-2). . . In Paul’s mind every subject, every address, and every epistle had a focus. Everything he did centered on making the cross and its implications evident. Although the apostle addressed many topics and drew on many sources, the panorama only displayed the Redeemer’s work in richer detail.

This apostolic ethic reflected the principles of exposition the Savior had himself revealed. Jesus propositionally stated the redemptive focus of all Scripture when he walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. There, “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:27; cf. John 5:39, 46). Jesus said that all the Scriptures were about him . . . The law and the prophets that proceed and the apostolic ministry that follows the work of the cross make Jesus the center. Prophets, apostles, and the Savior all testify that all Scriptures ultimately focus on the Redeemer. How can we rightly expound them and not speak of him? Expository preaching is Christ-centered preaching.⁵

Here is what others have written about the purpose of preaching:

Martyn Lloyd-Jones would not disagree that preaching should bring about change. He says this in *Preaching and Preachers*: “Preaching is that which deals with the total person, the hearer becomes involved and knows that he has been dealt with and addressed by God through this preacher. Something takes place in him and in his experience, and it is going to affect the whole of his life.”⁶

Jay Adams also affirms that preaching is to bring about change. In *Preaching with Purpose* he says, “The purpose of preaching, then, is to effect *changes* among the

⁴ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 271. Chapell acknowledges this quote coming from Thomas F. Jones, “Preaching the Cross of Christ,” unpublished essay presented in 1976-77 homiletics lectures at Covenant Theological Seminary, 1.

⁵ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 272.

⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 56.

members of God's church that build them up individually and that build up the body as a whole."⁷

Greidanus, like Keller, agrees with a sub-goal of preaching being life-change, but also like Keller, he contends in many of his writings that the ultimate goal of preaching is to lift up Christ. Both men argue that if lifting up Christ is your ultimate goal then the goal of true and lasting life-change will follow. In *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* Greidanus quotes many others who hold to the ultimate aim of preaching Christ. He says:

Homileticians from a wide variety of Christian traditions advocate the preaching of Christ. For example, the Roman Catholic author Domenico Grasso states, "The object and content of preaching is Christ, the Word in which the Father expresses Himself and communicates His will to man." . . . The Lutheran homiletician M. Reu contends, "It is necessary that the sermon be Christocentric, have no one and nothing else for its centre and content than Christ Jesus." The Reformed homiletician T. Hoekstra maintains, "In expositing Scripture for the congregation, the preacher . . . must show that there is a way to the center even from the farthest point on the periphery. For a sermon without Christ is no sermon." And the Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon says, "Preach Christ, always and everywhere. He is the whole of the gospel. His person, offices, and work must be our one great, all-comprehending theme."⁸

Again, I believe that the goal of preaching affects the style and model of preaching. I will consider that now.

Preaching Styles and Models

Keller, Chapell, Stanley and Warren all affirm an expository approach to preaching and they all acknowledge that there is a need for more of a narrative and conversational style in reaching their audiences. In this section I will present what these

⁷ Jay E. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 13.

⁸ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1-2.

men have written about their styles and models of preaching. I will look at each man individually to give an adequate overview of their writings on this subject.

Bryan Chapell

Chapell wrote the book on Christ-centered preaching—literally. His book, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, is used in seminaries around the world as an exposition on this model of preaching. In the preface of this book Chapell explains his commitment to Christ-centered preaching:

However well intended and biblically rooted may be a sermon's instruction, if the message does not incorporate the motivation and enablement inherent in a proper apprehension of the work of Christ, the preacher proclaims mere Pharisaism. Preaching that is faithful to the whole of Scripture not only establishes God's requirements, but also highlights the redemptive truths that make holiness possible. The task may seem impossible. How can we make all of Scripture center on Christ's work when vast portions make no mention of him? The answer lies in learning to see all of God's Word as a unified message of human need and divine provision.⁹

Chapell's commitment to this model of preaching informs what he calls the "obligations of the sermon." His three obligations are: unity, purpose and application. To discover the purpose of the sermon Chapell says the preacher must consider what he calls the "Fallen Condition Focus" of every passage. Chapell explains:

The FCF determines the real subject of the message since it is the real purpose of the passage. Ultimately, the one thing the sermon is about is how the text says today's Christians are to deal with the FCF. Various subdivisions and dimensions of the FCF may be developed as the sermon unfolds, but the main theme should remain clear. The agenda makes sense when we remember that the text's contents are God's response to an aspect of our fallenness. The FCF sets the tone, determines the approach, and organizes the information in a sermon.¹⁰

⁹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 12.

¹⁰ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 41-42.

With this commitment to exposing the FCF, Chapell asserts that biblical sermons must expound the redemptive message contained in all of Scripture. “In its context,” he says, “every passage possesses one or more of four redemptive foci. Every text is predictive of the work of Christ, preparatory for the work of Christ, reflective of the work of Christ, and/or resultant of the work of Christ.”¹¹ Therefore, Chapell’s mode of presenting a Christ-centered, redemptive sermon includes: identifying the fallen condition, specifying the Christ-focus and discerning the redemptive purpose. But he warns:

Proper exposition does not discover its Christ-focus by disposing of any passage or by imposing Jesus on the text, but by discerning the place and role of the text in the entire revelation of God’s redemptive plan. . . . A passage retains its Christocentric focus, and a sermon becomes Christ-centered, not because the preacher finds a slick way of wedging a reference to Jesus’ person or work into the message but because the sermon identifies a function this particular text legitimately serves in the great drama of the Son’s crusade against the serpent.¹²

Chapell summarizes his “procedure for Christ-Centered Exposition” with this outline:

- I. Identify the redemptive principles evident in the text.
 - A. Revealed aspects of the divine nature that provides redemption
 - B. Revealed aspects of human nature that requires redemption
- II. Determine what application these redemptive principles were to have in the lives of the believers in biblical context.
- III. In light of common human characteristics or conditions contemporary believers share with the biblical believers, apply the redemptive principles to contemporary lives.¹³

As mentioned above, it is important to note that although Chapell’s model of preaching emphasizes the preaching of Christ in all sermons, he believes that this type of preaching will produce life-change. He explains:

¹¹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 275.

¹² Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 292, 293.

¹³ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 298.

Although the FCF reveals why people need to listen and why God chooses to act, the redemptive exposition keeps the solution divine and precludes human presumption. Such exposition returns preaching to its foundation function of transformation. Men and women are still called to devotion but preachers issue the summons on the basis of God's action and by his power. We never inadvertently teach others to seek answers without truth, perform his bidding without his strength, or reap his blessing without the acceptance he alone provides. Faithful preaching is the practice of pointing others to a Provision beyond self so that they are able to do what God requires and what the regenerate heart desires. The doxological focus of redemptive exposition keeps this process intact.¹⁴

Timothy J. Keller

While Keller holds to a similar position as Chapell and argues for the exaltation of Christ and the gospel in all preaching he has a unique emphasis and style. He explains his emphasis and understanding of preaching the gospel in his article, *Keller on Preaching in a Post-modern City*. He says:

At the heart of Redeemer's ministry and its philosophy of preaching to post-modern audiences is the conviction that "the gospel" is not just a way to be saved from the penalty of sin, but is the fundamental dynamic for living the whole Christian life—individually and corporately, privately and publicly. In other words, the gospel is not just for non-Christians, but also for Christians. This means the gospel is not just the A-B-C's but the A to Z of the Christian life. It is not accurate to think 'the gospel' is what saves non-Christians, and then, that what matures Christians is trying hard to live according to biblical principles. It is more accurate to say that we are saved by believing the gospel, and then we are transformed in every part of our mind, heart, and life by believing the gospel more and more deeply as our life goes on.¹⁵

This philosophy compels Keller to present the gospel in every sermon he preaches and to put the emphasis in his preaching on the work of Jesus Christ and the inability of people to live rightly before God apart from this work. Keller argues for more (but not less) than

¹⁴ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 299.

¹⁵ Tim Keller, *Keller on Preaching in a Post-modern City* (The Movement, 2004) available from http://www.redeemer2.com/themovement/issues/2004/june/postmoderncity_1_p1.html (accessed 12 December 2009).

the Christ-centered model of preaching put forward by Chapell and others. Keller describes his model of preaching as, “the Christ-centered, Tri-perspectival model.”¹⁶ With this philosophy he affirms the Christ-centered model but expands it by drawing from the following three perspectives: (1) Geerhardus Vos and Biblical Theological Preaching; (2) Martin Luther and Gospel Preaching; and (3) Jonathan Edwards and Revival Preaching. Keller argues that these three perspectives bring the balance and nuance necessary for preaching to his post-modern audience in New York without abdicating expository preaching. For Keller, the perspective of Vos that supports “historical-redemptive” or “Christ-centered” preaching allows him to preach in a narrative and inductive style because this approach sees the Bible as one story with one central story-line which is the gospel. Keller says, “While only a minority of biblical passages actually give the whole story-line (of the Bible), every biblical text must be placed in the whole story-line to be understood. In other words, every text must be asked: ‘what does this tell me about the salvation we have in Christ?’ to be understood.”¹⁷

Discovering that his audience of young adults had trouble distinguishing between Christianity and moralism, Keller found Luther’s perspective especially helpful. He says:

Martin Luther, of course, pioneered an approach to preaching that distinguished between law and gospel. No one was clearer about the difference between gospel or grace motivation for obedience to God rather than moralistic, legalistic motivation. I discovered that post-modern secular people were extremely sensitive to the difference and found Luther’s approach vastly more palatable. Actually, they are more delighted with Luther’s approach than many evangelicals are who seem unaware of the moralistic tone of their preaching and ministry. Luther

¹⁶ Tim Keller, *Preaching the Gospel in a Post-modern World* (from the teaching notes for Reformed Theological Seminary, Doctor of Ministry Program, January 2002, 9-11) available from <http://hendersonhome.com/Keller/keller-on-preaching-syllabus.pdf> (accessed 12 December 2009).

¹⁷ Keller, *Preaching the Gospel*, 10.

showed me the way to appeal to people's hearts with the gospel rather than simply putting pressure on their wills with the law.¹⁸

Keller also says that he is able to speak to his post-modern listeners about their longing for experience by tapping into the perspective of Jonathan Edwards. He notes, “Edwards refused to pit ‘truth’ against ‘experience. He absolutely insisted on both. In a nutshell, Edwards would say that if a truth about Jesus Christ did not thrill, move, melt, electrify and change you—then you haven’t really understood it.”¹⁹ Clearly, Keller desires that a sermon, in the tradition of Edwards, brings about life-change. But he sees this change coming from an emphasis of Christ being exalted and the Scripture being expounded in both a truthful and experiential way.

Keller explains that his preaching is influenced by these three perspectives and that from these he has shaped a model for his preaching. In notes prepared for the Ockenga Institute Pastors’ Forum at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary²⁰ Keller suggests that there are four potential parts of a sermon:

1. The preacher’s text (passage of Scripture)
2. The original author’s message
3. The theme fulfilled in Christ
4. How this affects us (application)

Keller says that sermons can take different forms based on the order of these parts. For instance, sermons that merely draw on part one (the preacher’s text) and part two (the original author’s message) tend to be purely informational. If they use just part one and part four he says they have preached a sermon that is primarily about exhortation.

¹⁸ Keller, *Preaching the Gospel*, 10.

¹⁹ Keller, *Preaching the Gospel*, 11.

²⁰ These notes were a download option that came with the lecture series. The notes are dated Wednesday, April 5, 2006. Keller’s four potential parts of a sermon are found on page 4 of these notes.

According to Keller, a sermon incorporating (in this order) 1-2-3-4 would be a redemptive-historical sermon that includes application (part 4). The model that Keller advocates is what he calls “*preaching from the heart*” and it involves preaching parts one and two and *then* preaching part four *before* introducing part three (the theme fulfilled in Christ). So this is Keller’s typical sermon model (although he acknowledges that at times he will switch this order):

1. The preacher’s text (Scripture)
2. The original author’s message
4. How this affects us (application)
3. The theme fulfilled in Christ

By moving point 3 to the end, Keller puts emphasis on Christ by making him the subject of his final thoughts. In the notes from his lectures at Reformed Theological Seminary, Keller reaffirms Jesus as the center of his preaching model:

We must remember that the “Christo-centric” goal of ‘lifting up Christ’ suffuses the whole and is the key to it all. How so? It is only as you show how the text reveals Christ that you truly expound its meaning. It is only as you solve problems with Christ that you truly change lives. It is only as you point to the ultimate reference in Christ that the presentation jumps from being a “Sunday School lesson” into an act of worship.²¹

Because of his emphasis on his Christ-centered, Tri-perspectival model of preaching Keller always brings Christ into his sermons and upholds the redemptive-historical narrative of the Bible.

After considering Chapell and Keller as two exemplars in the “Christ-centered preaching” camp I will now look at two exemplars in the “preaching for change” camp: Stanley and Warren.

²¹ Tim Keller, Lecture notes: *Preaching the Gospel in a Post-modern World*, 17.

Andy Stanley

As mentioned above, Stanley's unapologetic goal in preaching is life change. In *Communicating for a Change*, he acknowledges that this goal should and will shape the way a person preaches. He explains:

Preaching for life change requires far less information and more application. Less explanation and more inspiration. Less first century and more twenty-first century. While I'm a firm believer that all Scripture is equally inspired, observation tells me that all Scripture is not equally applicable. Consequently, preaching for life change requires that we emphasize some texts over others . . . When you commit to preach for life change, your preparation is not complete until you have answered two very important questions: So what? And now what? Our preaching won't make a difference if our people don't understand what difference it is supposed to make. Our audience won't do much with what we've taught until we tell 'em what they ought to do.²²

Stanley's model of preaching is built around his emphasis on greater application and inspiration. When preparing a message he suggests the following steps:

1. Determine Your Goal
2. Pick a Point
3. Create a Map
4. Internalize the Message
5. Engage the Audience
6. Find Your Voice²³

While Stanley advocates that the goal of each sermon is life change he also emphasizes that for a sermon to illicit that change it should be built around one point, and only one point. He explains, "When I say *point* I am referring to one of three things: an application, an insight, *or* a principle. With this approach every message should have one central idea, application, insight or principle that serves as the glue to hold the other parts

²² Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 96-97.

²³ Stanley, these steps make up the chapter titles of the second half of his book, *Communicating for a Change*.

together.”²⁴ He adds that before he preaches it is crucial to answer these two questions: “What is the one thing I want my audience to know? What do I want them to do about it?”²⁵

After picking the point, Stanley says a preacher must create a clear outline and suggests this: ME-WE-GOD-YOU-WE. He explains:

With this approach the communicator introduces a dilemma he or she faces or is currently facing (ME). From there you find common ground with your audience around the same or similar dilemma (WE). Then you transition to the text to discover what God says about the tension or question you have introduced (GOD). Then you challenge your audience to act on what they have just heard (YOU). And finally, you close with several statements about what could happen in your community, church, or the world, if everybody embraced that particular truth (WE).²⁶

Engaging the audience is paramount to Stanley. He says, “*Attention and retention is determined by presentation, not information.* Presentation matters. A lot.”²⁷ He is not suggesting that the information is not important but rather that the information will not be heard, internalized and processed unless it is told in an engaging manner. It should be noted that Stanley’s book is almost entirely about his style and his model of communication. He says very little about sermon content other than assuming that it will come from the Scripture.

Stanley summarizes his style of preaching saying, “Application will be the driving force of the message, rather than a section tacked on the end. In my experience, this is a

²⁴ Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 103.

²⁵ Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 104.

²⁶ Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 120.

²⁷ Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 146.

much easier and more effective way to approach communicating the Scriptures.”²⁸ But it should be noted, Stanley acknowledges the necessary power of the Holy Spirit to bring about change in the lives of listeners. “At the end of the day,” he says, “it is God who empowers people to change. It is the Holy Spirit who opens the eyes of the heart. It is our Savior who gives men and women the courage to love and forgive. I, like you, am simply a mouthpiece.”²⁹

Rick Warren

Warren is one of the most famous preachers of our time. He prayed at the inauguration of the President in 2010, he’s authored best-selling books and grown his church to a congregation of over 20,000 people. Unfortunately, he has not written much about the craft of preaching. To discover his style and model of preaching I looked at his book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, and the manuscript from his two-session workshop on preaching.

Like Stanley, Warren says the primary purpose of his preaching is life change. His workshop on preaching is tellingly titled, *How to Communicate to Change Lives*. He too, places an emphasis on life-application. In *The Purpose Driven Church* he says,

Christ-like preaching is life-related and produces a changed lifestyle. It doesn’t just inform, it transforms. It changes people because the Word is applied to where people actually live. Sermons that teach people how to live will never lack an audience. Please understand: The unchurched are not asking that we change the message or even dilute it, only that we show its relevance. Their big question is, “So what?” They want to know what difference our message makes. I’ve found that the unchurched in America are very interested in Bible doctrine when it is applied in practical and relevant ways to their lives.³⁰

²⁸ Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 193.

²⁹ Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 185.

³⁰ Warren, *Purpose Driven Church*, 230.

In both his book and the notes from his seminar, Warren speaks of completely changing his preaching style when he started Saddleback Church. He was motivated by his passion to preach clearly to non-believers. He said, “I asked one question about ten years worth of (my) sermons: Would this make sense to a totally unchurched person who had never been in church before, a pagan with no religious background, who knew nothing about the Bible, would this make sense to that kind of person?”³¹ In *Purpose Driven Church*, he mentions that he often speaks differently to believers and non-believers. He says that while he might preach verse-by-verse to believers he is most apt to preach topically and from felt needs to non-believers. He explains:

Preaching that changes lives brings the truth of God’s word and the real needs of people together through application. Which end of the continuum you begin with (God’s word or people’s needs) depends on your audience. But what is more important is that you eventually bring God’s truth and people’s needs together through application, regardless of where the message begins.³²

After revamping his preaching style, Warren says he started asking eight questions during his preparation. He says his first two questions are about what to say and the next six are about how to say it. The questions are:³³

1. To whom will I be preaching?
2. What does the Bible say about their needs?
3. What is the most practical way to say it?
4. What is the most positive way to say it?
5. What is the most encouraging way to say it?
6. What is the simplest way to say it?
7. What is the most personal way to say this?
8. What is the most interesting way to say it?

³¹ Rick Warren, “How to Communicate to Change Lives,” (Workshop lecture, no date given).

³² Warren, *Purpose Driven Church*, 296.

³³ Warren, *How to Communicate to Change Lives*, 3-19, 27, 31.

These questions shape the content of Warren's sermons. Warren, in contrast to Stanley, often makes multiple points in a sermon and insists that each point be stated as an action and most often start with a verb. Warren believes that sermons must be positive and simple. "The more complicated your sermon is, the easier it falls apart," he says. "The simpler your sermon is, the stronger it is, the longer it's going to last."³⁴ To keep a sermon simple he suggests these steps:³⁵

1. Condense your message into a single sentence.
2. Avoid using religious terms in your service for seekers.
3. Keep your outline simple.
4. Make your application the points of your outline.

Warren contends for a communication outline over a content outline. He says that a content outline simply gives the content of the passage. A communication outline, according to Warren, brings about life change. His typical communication outline is this:³⁶

1. Establish a need: Why talk about this?
2. Give personal examples.
3. Present a plan: Here's step by step how you can do it too.
4. Offer hope: You can do this. I know you can do this. God will help you.
5. Call for a commitment: Ask them to step across the line.
6. Expect results: I know you're going to do something about this right now.

Warren sums up what he believes is the key to effective preaching. He says, "The most important key to effective preaching is this: Love people. You've got to love people. We must love people to the Lord."³⁷

³⁴ Warren, *How to Communicate to Change Lives*, 18.

³⁵ Warren, *How to Communicate to Change Lives*, 18-21.

³⁶ Warren, *How to Communicate to Change Lives*, 26.

³⁷ Warren, *How to Communicate to Change Lives*, 36.

Summary of Preaching Styles

Effective preaching matters to each of these men. All of them desire to honor God with their message and their presentation. All of them believe that style matters and all care deeply about how the Scripture and the truth is presented. Both Keller and Chapell spend far more time in their writing on the content of the message while Stanley and Warren concentrate on the style of presentation. I believe I can learn from all four of these premiere preachers. It is apparent in their writings that all of these men believe that application is crucial to a good sermon. I will consider this now.

Applying the Text in Preaching

Application is obviously paramount to the preaching styles of Warren and Stanley who both suggest that the entirety of a sermon should be built around application. Although Keller and Chapell don't suggest that the sermon be built around application they do see it as a crucial element of preaching. Keller writes that the preacher should "weave application throughout the sermon."³⁸ Chapell notes that "application must precede final decisions about structure, wording, and even the tone of the message or else the preacher will be designing a highway without a destination."³⁹ He also calls application the "so what" of preaching and gives this illustration:

Memorable in my own homiletics training was the air force colonel turned seminary professor who challenged students, no matter where they preached in future years, to imagine him sitting in the back of the sanctuary. With a benign scowl the professor growled, "In your mind's eye look at me whenever you have said your concluding word. My arms are folded, my face holds a frown, and this question hangs on my lips: 'so what? What do you want me to do? If you cannot answer, you have not preached.'"⁴⁰

³⁸ Keller, *Lecture Notes*, 89.

³⁹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 202.

⁴⁰ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 44.

For Chapell, the key to application is the Fallen Condition Focus of a passage and, of course, remaining Christ-centered. He says,

Early statements of the FCF in the sermon may open the door to application in several ways. The preacher may open a spiritual or an emotional wound in order to provide biblical healing; identify a grief in order to offer God's comfort; demonstrate a danger in order to warrant a scriptural command; or condemn a sin in order to offer cleansing to a sinner. In each case, the statement of the FCF creates a listener's longing for the Word by identifying the biblical needs the passage addresses. The surfacing of such needs compels the preacher to "do something" about them. This compulsion becomes the spiritual imperative that leads the preacher to discern the text's answers and instructions. When crystallized, applications that are true to the text's purpose, focus and context naturally develop.⁴¹

Warren and Stanley would each resonate with Chapell's mention of "needs." They see needs as a way to engage an audience and enter into the application of the text. Stanley says,

Preaching for life change involves picking passages that are most appropriate for and applicable to our target audience. This is what Jesus did. This is what the apostle Paul did. They addressed felt needs and supported their teaching with references from the Old Testament. Nowhere in the Scriptures is there an example of, or reference to, any one teaching through a book of the Old Testament.⁴²

Because of Chapell's emphasis on the FCF in every passage he would hold that all Scripture is appropriate and applicable to his audience. But he agrees that preachers should point out needs as presented in Scripture. He says:

Note: A "biblical need" may or may not be a "felt need." In recent years, much criticism has been offered of preaching that focuses on felt needs in order to make the gospel appealing . . . Such criticism rightly assumes that a steady diet of preaching focused on felt needs can make faith and worship purely matters of self-concern. At the same time, the gospel often helps people to see their biblical needs through felt needs (John 4:4-26; Acts 17:22-23). Preachers should not be

⁴¹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 45-46.

⁴² Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 96-97.

afraid to help others see their biblical needs in order for such persons to discern their biblical obligations.⁴³

While Chapell gets at application through the FCF, Stanley says that his ME-WE-GOD-YOU-WE outline “sets you up to address the issue of application in the beginning as well as at the end. If you open the message with your struggle (ME), and relate it to *their* struggle (WE), you are already in the arena of applied truth.”⁴⁴ He suggests that every preacher ask, “What do they need to do?” and then “be specific and be creative.”⁴⁵ Warren would agree that application needs to be specific and adds that the preacher must “tell them why” and “show them how.”⁴⁶

Keller says that “it is impossible to do Christ-centered application in a sermon if you have not first done Christ-centered exposition.”⁴⁷ So, for him application is rooted in the exposition of the text and is focused upon Christ. When writing about application Keller gives these “three broad strategies for application that flow out of a Redemptive-Historical approach.”⁴⁸ He suggests that when applying the text the preacher should

1. Critique Religion as well as Irreligion
2. Challenge with the Comfort of the Gospel
3. Aim at the Heart-Motives under (as well as) Behavior

⁴³ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 46.

⁴⁴ Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 126.

⁴⁵ Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 188.

⁴⁶ Warren, *Communicating to Change Lives*, 9.

⁴⁷ Keller, *Lecture Notes*, 69.

⁴⁸ Keller, *Lecture Notes*, 71-80. This is a very brief summary of Keller’s thoughts, in Keller’s words.

Keller gives this basic outline for aiming at the heart as well as behavior when making application:⁴⁹

1. What Must You Do?

Here is what the text/narrative tells us that we must do or what we must be."

2. Why You Can't Do It.

Here are all the reasons that you will never become like this just by trying very hard.

3. How He Did It.

But there's one who did —perfectly. Jesus. He has done this for us, in our place.

4. How, Through Him, You Can Do It.

Our failure to do it is due to our functional rejection of what he did. Remembering him frees our heart so we can change like this...

It is obvious that Keller's emphasis on exalting Christ in preaching shapes even his application outline which demonstrates his desire for all sermons to bring about lasting life change. Stanley's emphasis on life change seems to inform the outline he uses to get at application. He suggests these questions (and the corresponding style) for arriving at application:⁵⁰

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. What do they need to know? | INFORMATION |
| 2. Why do they need to know it? | MOTIVATION |
| 3. What do they need to do? | APPLICATION |
| 4. Why do they need to do it? | INSPIRATION |
| 5. How can I help them to remember? | REITERATION |

Chapell asks many of the same questions but there are some marked differences. He lists his "four key question" as:⁵¹

1. What does God now require of me?
2. Where does he require it of me?
3. Why must I do what he requires of me?
4. How can I do what God requires?

⁴⁹ Keller, *Lecture Notes*, 78.

⁵⁰ Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 191.

⁵¹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 204.

Chapell's and Stanley's questions might be similar but there is a key question that is missing from Stanley's list. He does not ask the question, "How will they do it?" The most similar question he asks is, "What do they need to do?" but his answer is very different from Chapell's response to "how can I do what God requires?" In answer to Stanley's question he simply says that the listener needs for the preacher to "be specific and creative." He says, "Give your audience something very specific to do. Something so specific they will know immediately whether or not they have done it."⁵²

Chapell would not argue against being specific or creative but in contrast when he clarifies the question "How can I do what God requires?" he emphasizes the inability of men and women apart from the enabling of the God. He explains:

When preachers tell their congregation to love their neighbors as themselves, but do not point to the Spirit who alone makes this love possible, then people assume that this love is something they can stimulate in themselves. Too many applications are simply human-centered exhortations to do better in the power of the flesh. Preachers may assume that people will not try to do as the Bible instructs without seeking God's enabling power, but this is a naïve expectation. If preachers can neglect to mention divine dependence, why should they be surprised that the people forget to seek divine enablement?

The power to do what God requires resides in God. Responsible preaching does not tell people their responsibilities without also informing them how to plug into this power. Jay Kesler, president of Taylor University, says that a sermon without enabling instruction is like shouting to a drowning person, "Swim! Swim!" The advice is correct but not helpful. It simply tells someone to do what in their situation they have no means to accomplish.⁵³

This distinction between Stanley and Chapell represents a significant difference between these two camps and it deeply effects how they think and write about preaching morality without preaching moralism. We will consider that now.

⁵² Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 188.

⁵³ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 209-210.

Preaching Moral Imperatives and Avoiding Moralism

When it comes to preaching the moral imperatives of Scripture all of our exemplars speak to the necessity of exposing their audiences to these truths. This is made evident primarily by the examples they use about preaching. For instance, Stanley talks about doing a series on purity that he entitled, “Flee”⁵⁴ and Keller gives examples of how to address the commandments not to steal, commit adultery and others.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, but potentially telling, neither Stanley nor Warren make a single reference to the issue of moralism in their writings. Chapell and Keller however each dedicate a considerable amount of words to this issue.

Keller addresses his concern that a listener can hear a message through a “moralistic grid” by quoting Chapell. He says:

The ultimate reason that we expound Christ in every passage is because that's the truth! The whole Bible is about Christ. That is the “theological-hermeneutical” reason for the Redemptive-Historical Method. But there is a “theological-pastoral” reason as well. Bryan Chapell points out in a taped message that we are to preach Christ to “complete” the hearers (Col 1:28: “perfect” is better rendered “complete”). This means that our preaching assumes fallenness and incompleteness in the listener. Chapell goes on to say that any sermon that does not focus on Christ and his saving work but only provides “marks of a good church” or “marks of a strong family” or “how to pray” is to provide a “sub-text” message that the listeners can complete themselves or make themselves acceptable to God. Even if the preacher does not say that, even if the preacher says many true things about the text—if the preacher does not put the text into the overall message of salvation by grace and the finished work of Christ the listener will automatically hear through a moralistic grid. A sermon that only tells listeners how they must live without putting that into the context of the gospel gives them the impression that they are complete enough to pull themselves together if they really try hard.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*, 111.

⁵⁵ Keller, *Lecture Notes*, 39.

⁵⁶ Keller, *Lecture Notes*, 23.

This hearing “through a moralistic grid” is of great concern to Keller and Chapell. And it is the concern of this thesis. The question is how does an evangelical preacher who believes definitively in salvation by grace through faith alone preach morality without preaching moralism. None of these preachers would aim at preaching moralism, none hold a theological position that would lean toward moralism but there can be a tendency for the hearer to hear moralism if the preacher is not careful. That is what Keller and Chapell address. Chapell explains, saying, “Christian preachers often do not recognize this impact of their words (moralism) because they are simply recounting a behavior clearly specified in the text in front of them. But a message that even inadvertently teaches others that their works win God’s acceptance inevitably leads people away from the gospel.”⁵⁷

Of course, neither Stanley nor Warren believes that transformation comes from the sheer will of men and women asserting themselves to change. Warren notes in his interview with *preaching.com* that sin is rooted in unbelief and that change begins in the mind. He says:

Because change starts in the mind and sin starts with a lie, and behavior starts with belief—to help people change, you have to change their beliefs first. You don't work on their behavior; you work on their beliefs, because it always starts in their mind. That is why Jesus says you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. . . [But] *you* don't change people's minds; God's Word does. So we bring people into contact with God's Word.⁵⁸

It could be argued that Warren is saying the same thing as Keller and Chapell but what seems to be missing from Warren’s argument is any reference to the redemptive context

⁵⁷ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 269.

⁵⁸ Rick Warren, “Preaching for Life Change by Rick Warren: May 2008,” Preaching Online, <http://www.preaching.com/resources/preaching-online/11574244/> (accessed October 10, 2009).

of Scripture (although he most likely affirms this context). Chapell seems to take a hit at Warren's style of preaching without mentioning him by name. He criticizes what he calls "the deadly be's"— messages that emphasize "be like," "be good," and "be disciplined." He summarizes his critique saying,

"Be" messages full only of moral instruction imply that we are able to change our fallen condition in our own strength. Such sermons communicate (although usually unintentionally) that we clear the path to grace and that our works earn and/or secure our acceptance with God. . . There are many "be" messages in the Scripture, but they always reside in a redemptive context. Since we cannot be anything that God would approve apart from his sanctifying power, the source of that grace must permeate any exhortation for biblical behavior. "Be" messages are not wrong in themselves; they are wrong messages by themselves. People cannot do or be what God requires without the work of Christ in, for, and through them. . . Thus, instruction in biblical behavior barren of redemptive truth only wounds, and though it is offered as an antidote to sin much preaching either promotes Pharisaism or prompts despair.⁵⁹

The question is how do these men approach preaching moral imperatives with or without being moralistic? Unfortunately, Stanley does not give any direct examples in his writing. Keller and Chapell obviously address the issue head-on, even using the language of moralism. Warren does give multiple examples of how he addresses moral issues in his preaching. I will look at Warren first and then Keller and Chapell.

Upholding his value of positivity, Warren gives us insight into how he addresses sin:

How do you preach against sin in a positive way? The answer is promote the positive alternative. In other words, be for the right thing rather than spend so much time being against the wrong thing. For instance, I don't preach *against* unfaithfulness as much as I preach *for* faithfulness (How to affair proof your marriage. How do you keep it from happening?). I don't preach *against* dishonesty as much as I preach *for* integrity. I don't preach *against* a lack of commitment as much as I preach *for* commitment. I don't preach *against* sin as

⁵⁹ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 284-285.

much as I preach *for* righteousness. Sometimes it's just a simple changing of the words.⁶⁰

Warren goes on to give this example of how he preached the Ten Commandments:

In the first series on the Ten Commandments I changed the titles and here were the messages: "How to Set Your Priorities" (*You shall have no other God's before Me*); "How to Know the Real God" (*Don't make any graven idols*); "How to take God seriously" (*Don't take God's name in vain*); "How to prevent burnout" (*Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy*). . . What I did was say the negative in a positive way. You preach the whole counsel of God. It's just in the way that you say it.⁶¹

Unfortunately, you can't tell from Warren's writing if he connects the gospel to these imperatives or not. In contrast to Warren, Keller says this about addressing some of the

Ten Commandments:

Therefore, we can't explain why we "shall not steal" unless we look at Jesus' ultimate generosity—who "thought it not robbery" to remain in heaven but gave it away, who "though rich became poor for your sakes." We can't explain why we "shall not commit adultery" unless we look at the faithfulness and (properly) "jealous" love Jesus has shown to us on the cross. His "jealous" love does not only define sexual fidelity, but it gives us the only sufficient motive and power to practice it ourselves. Jesus is not simply the ultimate example, but as the fulfiller of the principles for us at infinite cost to himself, he changes the inner dynamics of our hearts so we can desire and long to be like him.⁶²

Keller later expands upon his philosophy of preaching the gospel and avoiding moralism when writing about exhorting listeners to "right living:"

Jonathan Edwards points out that "true virtue" is only possible for those who have experienced the grace of the gospel. Any person who is trying to earn their salvation does "the right thing" in order to get into heaven or in order to better their self- esteem (etc.). In other words the ultimate motive is self-interest. But persons who know they are totally accepted already do "the right thing" out of

⁶⁰ Warren, *How to Communicate to Change Lives*, 13.

⁶¹ Warren, *How to Communicate to Change Lives*, 15.

⁶² Keller, *Lecture Notes*, 39.

sheer delight in righteousness for its own sake. Only in the gospel do you obey God for God's sake, and not for what God will give you.⁶³

Chapell concludes his book and his emphasis on grace over moralism saying,

No precise formula should instruct preachers how to maintain Christ-centered perspective regarding the application of biblical truth. However, when people walk away from a message understanding that grace both motivates and enables them to serve God, futile human striving and vain self-vaunting vanish. Preachers, then, should make God's redemptive work the content, the motive, and the power behind all biblical exposition. Only when people look beyond themselves for spiritual health do they find their sole hope and source of power to do what God requires appear.⁶⁴

Again, it is too bad that Warren and Stanley do not directly address avoiding moralism in their writings. I will seek to observe their practice in the next section as I evaluate their actual preaching.

⁶³ Keller, *Lecture Notes*, 75.

⁶⁴ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 310.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

In order to understand how morality can be preached without preaching moralism to young adults I considered the moral climate among young adults in the current culture, studied the theological issues pertinent to this discussion and assessed the helpful literature addressing this topic. In the previous chapter, I looked specifically at the writing of four preachers from two divergent camps of preaching within evangelicalism: Stanley and Warren from the “preaching for life change” camp, and Keller and Chapell from the “Christ-centered preaching” camp. In this chapter I will analyze their actual preaching to discover how and if they preach morality without preaching moralism. I will: (1) give the background on each of these preachers; (2) discuss the sermons used for evaluation; (3) explain the methodology and details of the actual research; and (4) summarize my findings on how to preach morality without preaching moralism

Background of Selected Preachers

Dr. Timothy J. Keller

Keller is currently the Senior Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City.¹ He founded the church in 1989. Redeemer is made up primarily of young adults from 20-30 year olds who are the intellectual elite, the artist in pursuit of a dream and the Wall Street maverick. The church has over 5,000 attending their multiple services.

Prior to serving at Redeemer, Keller taught at Westminster Theological Seminary. Before that he spent nine years as the pastor of West Hopewell Presbyterian Church in

¹ This biographical information is from www.timothykeller.com (accessed August 15, 2010).

Virginia. He is a graduate of Bucknell University, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Westminster Theological Seminary. Keller is ordained by the Presbyterian Church in America. He has written a number of books including: *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*; *The Prodigal God: Christianity Redefined through the Parable of the Prodigal Sons*; and *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters*. It is significant to note that Keller is outspoken in his preaching and writing on the topic of moralism in preaching. He has written articles cited in this thesis addressing the topic of avoiding moralism in preaching.

Dr. Bryan Chapell

Chapell is president and professor of practical theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri.² He served as a Pastor for ten years before joining the faculty at Covenant. He has served as the president of the seminary since 1994. Covenant is a seminary of the Presbyterian Church in America. Chapell has degrees from Northwestern University, Covenant Theological Seminary and Southern Illinois University.

Chapell has a radio show and has authored many books including, *Christ-Centered Preaching* in which he argues for Christ being preached in every sermon.

Dr. Rick Warren

Warren is the founder and senior pastor of Saddleback Church which is described on his website as “an evangelical church averaging 22,000 weekly attendees.”³ Warren

² This biographical information is from www.covenantseminary.edu/faculty/bryan.chapell/interests/ and <http://www.covenantseminary.edu/faculty/bryan.chapell/> (accessed August 15, 2010).

³ This biographical information is from: <http://rickwarren.com/about/rickwarren/> (accessed August 15, 2010).

graduated from California Baptist University, Southwestern Theological Seminary and Fuller Theological Seminary. He is the author of numerous books including, *The Purpose Driven Church* and *The Purpose Driven Life*. In *The Purpose Driven Church*, Warren argues that the purpose of preaching is to bring about life-change in the listener.

Andy Stanley

Stanley is the senior pastor of North Point Community Church and its Atlanta satellite campuses.⁴ He is the son of Charles Stanley who is the senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta where Andy had his first experience in ministry as an associate pastor and director of youth ministries. Stanley graduated from Georgia State University and Dallas Theological Seminary. He has authored many books on leadership, Christian living and communication. His book, *Communicating for a Change*, advocates for life-change as the aim of all preaching.

Summary of Sermons used for Evaluation

In order to evaluate each of these preachers and their ability to preach morality without preaching moralism I sought to find sermons from each that addressed issues of morality. The topics I chose were sexual purity and the Ten Commandments. I have evaluated sermons by each preacher on the topic of sexual purity while evaluating just Keller, Stanley and Warren on their Ten Commandment Series. Unfortunately, I was unable to find sermons by Chapel on the Ten Commandments.

For the sermons on sexual purity I chose sermons by each man on 1 Thessalonians 4. I evaluated the following sermons:

Andy Stanley

What about Sex?

⁴ This biographical information is from: http://www.newreleasetuesday.com/authordetail.php?aut_id=135 (accessed August 15, 2010).

Rick Warren	Clear Thinking about Sex
Bryan Chapell	Between the Fences (1 Thessalonians 4)
Tim Keller	Sex (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)

As I perused the series on the Ten Commandments I found a range of styles and approaches. Stanley's series was only five weeks while Keller's was nineteen and Warren's was ten. Stanley gives a broader overview of the Decalogue while Keller takes each commandment week by week and often takes two to three weeks on just one commandment. Warren, as is typical of his style and philosophy of preaching, grounds his series within the context of an applicable theme, and entitles it: "The Foundation for Strong Families." In contrast Keller simply titles his series, "The Ten Commandments." I listened to all of Stanley's series because it was simply five weeks and five of the commandments preached by Keller and Warren. In order to evaluate apples to apples I applied my rubric to each man's sermon on the third commandment, "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God."

Methodology of Research

To assess the preaching of each exemplar I created a rubric to guide my evaluation (see Appendix 1). The challenge of preaching morality without preaching moralism is to preach the necessity of obedience without implying that this necessary obedience is a means of salvation. The Scripture affirms that God desires obedience from his followers (Luke 11:28, John 14:23; I John 2:5) but it also insists that salvation does not come as a result of this obedience (Ephesians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 5:8). As stated in chapter two I believe that obedience is a necessary result of salvation but not a means of salvation.

I created a rubric to evaluate the preacher's ability to affirm obedience to God's command while holding to the necessity of grace for salvation. I wanted to see how and if these preachers held the gospel of grace and the sufficiency of Christ alongside their call to holiness. To do this I considered how Christocentric the sermon was by asking the number of times Jesus and the gospel are mentioned. I asked about the application of the passage to see if and how they called their listener to obedience. I also asked about moralism and if the preacher said anything that could be heard as moralistic. Ultimately I wanted to know if the sermon came across as moralistic or Christocentric and if the preacher was successful in preaching morality without preaching moralism.

Research Summary

On the following page is a summary of the content analysis on preaching sexual purity:

Preaching on Sexual Purity				
	Warren	Stanley	Chapell	Keller
Christocentric [How often is Jesus and/or the gospel mentioned?]	1 Time.	3 Times.	4 Times.	5 Times.
Application	High on application; Making positive choices & the path back to purity	High on application; what to do to avoid sexual immorality.	High on application. Spoke of avoiding sexual immorality but focused mainly on how to make choices.	Medium. Application was more about changing a person's mind rather than practical steps to sexual purity.
Moralism	Very. Talks much about the judgment of God but little of the grace of God.	Somewhat. Does not suggest that you must be sexually pure to gain salvation but does not mention how one is saved. Spend an inordinate amount of time on how women dress that could come off moralistic to women.	Somewhat. Seemed to assume all of his listeners were Christian. A non-Christian my hear this sermon and assume that to gain right standing with God you have to follow his will (without an understanding of saving grace).	Little. Clear about Jesus at the total sacrifice for humankind. Communicates the gospel at the beginning and end of sermon but could have been clearer.
Moralistic or Christocentric [Scale of 1-7; 7 is very Christocentric]	2	3	4	7

Ability to preach morality without moralism [Scale of 1-7; 7 is without question]	2	4	4	5
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Here is a summary of the content analysis on preaching the third command:

Preaching on the Third Command			
	Warren	Stanley	Keller
Christocentric [How often is Jesus and/or the gospel mentioned?]	5 Times.	3 Times. More God-centered. Says a lot about God but not Jesus.	8 Times.
Application	High. How we misuse God's name and how to use it correctly. Emphasis on cleaning up your mouth.	High. Clears up misconception of the command. Main point: don't use God to justify sin (that which is not of God).	High. Re-defines command (not just cussing). Clear and do-able application.
Moralism	Little. Clear that Christ gives power to change and that Christ is the way to salvation.	None. Very clear you can't "earn" God's favor.	None. Clear presentation of the gospel. Confronts moralism saying that you can have right doctrine, right emotional engagement and right Christian activity and NOT truly know Jesus. God accepts us because of what Jesus did, not because of what we do.
Moralistic or Christocentric [Scale of 1-7; 7 is very Christocentric]	6	6 More God-centric than Christ-centric but not moralistic.	7
Ability to preach morality without moralism [Scale of 1-7; 7 is without question]	6	7	7

Based on his writings, it's not surprising that Keller was the most Christocentric in his preaching. Keller mentions Jesus in any one of his sermons on the Ten Commandments almost more than Warren did in his entire series on the same topic! What is surprising, is that Chapell spoke very little of Jesus and he's the author of *Christ-Centered Preaching*! But, I was pleasantly surprised to see Stanley be so proficient at preaching morality without preaching moralism. I think this comes from his value of clarity in preaching. In his series on the Ten Commandments he seemed to bend over backward to be sure to communicate that salvation is not gained through obedience but that obedience is the natural response of a saving relationship. He dedicated his entire first sermon of the series to this concept and repeated it in each individual sermon of the series.

The most practical sermons came from Warren as he held true to his emphasis on life change in preaching. There was no doubt that a listener heard at least one thing (if not 20 things!) from Warren that they could apply to their life that day. Unfortunately, Warren was usually very weak in preaching morality without preaching moralism. This is because he rarely mentioned Jesus or the gospel. An exception to this in his series on the Ten Commandments was the sermon evaluated on the third command in which he mentioned Jesus five times and gave a clear presentation of the gospel. In the rest of his Ten Commandment series he had a tendency to only mention Jesus two to three times and rarely gave clear articulation of the gospel. He also tends to motivate for obedience by focusing on avoiding God's judgment (four times in the sermon on third command). While this is certainly a Biblical motivation it can be construed as moralism when it is not balanced with a clear gospel presentation. It also appears that Warren assumes that

his listeners know that Jesus is important so he is remiss in mentioning him. I think this is a mistake on his part.

In the next chapter, I will discuss what I learned from this research in regard to preaching morality without preaching moralism, which I believe is indeed possible to do. I will also share what I wish I had done differently in approaching this research, the implications of this research on my personal ministry and further areas of research in this field of study.

CHAPTER FIVE

PROJECT OUTCOMES

I believe it is possible to preach morality without preaching moralism and in this chapter I will share what I have learned to help accomplish this goal. I will also share the practical implications of these lessons upon my own ministry, the things I wish I had done differently in my research and the potential for future research on this topic.

Lessons Learned

In researching for this thesis I learned that to preach morality without preaching moralism the following issues are crucial: intentionality, clarity, emphasis on Christ, style and self-awareness. I address each of these issues below:

Intentionality

To preach morality without preaching moralism I must be intentional. Luther said that the default of the human heart is religion (moralism) and, in light of my research, I think we could say that the default of the sermon is the same. It was surprising that even Chapell, the author of the book on Christ-centered-preaching, seemed to default to moralistic messages. Certainly, this is not his intent, nor is it the intent of Warren or Stanley. But, listening to many of their sermons caused me to conclude that at least one thing can stand in the way of the intention to preach morality without preaching morality. That one thing is wrong assumptions.

Wrong assumptions keep us from being intentional about preaching the gospel alongside moral application or preaching moral application alongside the gospel. The temptation is to *assume* that the listener knows that salvation is by grace through faith alone that Jesus is above all other gods, that application is made by the mysterious

combination of free will and the Spirit's work and that morality is imperative to a life of following Jesus. If I *assume* that they understand these truths I will not preach them and I will potentially confuse my listeners theologically and practically. I must be intent upon not leading my listener into a life of moralism or into a faith devoid of good works.

As I listened to the sermons of each of these men it was apparent that they made assumptions about their audience's understanding. Perhaps Chapell's lack of emphasis on Jesus comes from his assumption that his audience is primarily Christians from a Reformed tradition who already embrace a biblical theology centered on Christ, but I think he misses a beautiful opportunity for clearly exalting Jesus. Warren seemed to be the preacher who assumed most that his audience already grasped the gospel and knew that all truth hinged on Jesus. I say this because he rarely mentioned Jesus and often the most attention he gave to him was in his closing prayer. This is particularly interesting in light of the fact that Warren identifies many in his congregation as people seeking Jesus but not yet Christians. I believe the result of this Warren's apparent assumption is moralistic sermons high on application but short on the gospel. When I preach, I want to be careful not to assume what my audience understands and therefore miss an opportunity to be intentional about preaching the gospel along with the moral imperatives.

I need to search my heart and my mind to discover what I am wrongly assuming.

These questions can help:

1. What do I assume my audience knows and believes about the gospel of grace?
2. Why do I assume this? Is this a correct assumption?
3. What do I assume my audience knows and believes about the moral imperatives of Christ?
4. Do I assume they know morality is a right response to following Jesus?
5. Why do I assume this? Is it a correct?

6. Do I assume they know that salvation is by grace through faith alone?
7. Why do I assume this? Is it correct?
8. What are the implications on my preaching if I am wrong about these assumptions?

Clarity

Wrong assumptions can also keep me from clarity and clarity is crucial to preaching morality without preaching moralism. If I am not clear that salvation is by grace through faith alone, my preaching may be heard as moralistic. If I am not clear that obedience is integral to followership of Jesus (John 15:10, 14) then my listeners might take from my preaching that they are free to sin boldly in light of God's love and grace (antinomianism).

Paul gives examples for *clearly* addressing each of these errors. In Romans 6:1-14, he addresses the idea of antinomianism by saying:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives he lives to God.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

Notice Paul's pattern for clarity:

Paul clearly states the potential misunderstanding. In verse 1 he says what they are thinking, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" By stating what they are thinking he engages his listener and is able to address any confusion.

Paul clearly states the right response. In verse 2 he strongly states, "By no means!" He does not leave their understanding of a right response to their own interpretation. He does not veil the right response in too many words or vague illustrations. If ever there was an example of clarity, this is it. The right response is to *not* continue in sin just because of the abundance of grace.

Paul clearly affirms right doctrine. Paul grounds his response in truth. He says that the reason for not continuing in sin is not to avoid hell but rather because it is not consistent with the new nature given in Christ (verses 2-10, 14).

Paul clearly gives personal application. In verses 11-14 he calls his listeners to count themselves dead to sin and then tells them how to do this: "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body"; "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness"; "Offer yourselves to God"; and "Offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness."

Notice too, Paul's clarity when addressing works-righteousness. In a number of places Paul uses the principle of repetition and restatement to make his point clear. Consider Ephesians 2:8-9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and *this is not from yourselves*, it is the gift of God—*not by works*, so that no one can boast." He also uses repetition and restatement in Galatians 2:15-16, 21:

We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that *a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ*. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that *we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law*, because *by observing the law no one will be justified*. . . I do not set aside the grace of God, for *if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!*

Clarity, clarity, clarity. We cannot be too clear in communicating God’s truth.

Stanley demonstrates this principle beautifully in his sermon series on the Ten Commandments. He is determined to make sure that his audience does not lapse into moralism as he calls them to obey God’s moral code and so he also elicits the practice of repetition and restatement. He uses the same simple phrase throughout the entire series, repeating it in each sermon he preaches. He says over and over that the Ten Commandments are not given as a “condition for a relationship with God but as confirmation of a relationship with God.” Then he restates this idea in multiple ways: “relationship precedes rules,” “the goal wasn’t to make bad people good but to keep free people free,” “God wasn’t giving laws to make them his children but because they were his children,” and “God gave the law because he loved them, not to get them to love him.” Often I will use repetition and restatement in one sermon, but Stanley showed me how important it is to use this principle throughout an entire preaching series.

Another principle of clarity is to just say it. Say it concisely and say it strongly. At times I can attempt a smooth transition and the result is a lack of clarity. I believe it is better to just stop and make your statement than to worry about the style of the transition. Keller often does this at the end of a section on application. He will simply pause and say something like, “I could stop here and you will leave determined to try harder, but that determination will not last. You must be captured by the beauty of Christ and what he has

done for you...” And then he shares the gospel or tells how Jesus has gone before us in humility or servanthood or forgiveness.

Clarity is crucial to this discussion because, as mentioned above, we are so prone to assumption. We want to believe, “Of course, they know that salvation is by grace,” or “Surely, they understand that just because God loves them they can’t just continue in sin.” But many of those listening do not know and we need to be clear so that they will hear the truth and live the truth. We also need to be clear in communicating that at the center of our faith is Jesus Christ.

Emphasis on Christ

As I listened to numerous sermons by these evangelical preachers I was stunned at how little they mentioned Jesus. Keller was the exception to this rule, but the others tended to be far more God-centered than Christ-centered and at times rarely even mentioned God or Jesus. Obviously, this can be a hindrance in preaching morality without preaching moralism because a gospel without Christ loses the powerful combination of grace and truth.

Some will argue that to mention God is enough and often more true to the text (especially when preaching from the Old Testament). I disagree. Books and passages of Scripture cannot be viewed in isolation. They must be read and interpreted in light of the entire Bible which ultimately points to Jesus. When we fail to exalt Christ in our preaching we miss an opportunity for worship and will tend toward an anthropomorphic emphasis. When we fail to worship Christ and instead put the emphasis on humanity we are on a slippery slope toward moralism. I believe that change brought about through

worship and a growing understanding of Jesus has greater potential to last than change manipulated through guilt, shame and self-effort.

This does not mean that God, the Father and God, the Holy Spirit, can be neglected. Our faith is a Trinitarian faith and is rooted in the fullness of the godhead. Our preaching is certainly anemic if it does not put the doctrine of the Trinity on display. I was discouraged to hear almost no mention of the Holy Spirit in the sermons I listened to. This is not helpful either and I was challenged to consider how I put the work of the Holy Spirit on display in my preaching. Certainly, sermons on life-change and moral living must mention the indwelling empowerment of the Spirit that is given to every believer.

Preaching Jesus is crucial to preaching morality without preaching moralism. Jesus tells us that he—not good works or spiritual experience—is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). Jesus puts on display grace and forgiveness when he meets a woman caught in adultery and declares that she is not condemned (John 8:11) and also when he enlists a Samaritan woman of ill-repute to take his message to her community (John 4:28-30, 39). Jesus demonstrates and declares that obedience is normative in a relationship with God when he says that he only does what the Father has given him to do (John 5:19-20) and he only says what the Father has given him to say (John 12:49). Jesus declares that to love him is to obey him (John 15:9-17). Jesus is our means of salvation (Matthew 1:21; John 1:12-13, 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 10:9-11) and our model of morality (2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 2:5-8). Just a passing mention of Jesus is not enough. We cannot preach morality without preaching moralism—without preaching Christ.

Style

How we say something is almost as important as what we say. A poor presentation is difficult to hear. Unfortunately, Chapell came across dull and scripted to me so I had a hard time listening to even short presentations by him. The other three men have very different styles, but all of them are engaging. I enjoyed listening to their sermons even when I thought they fell short of preaching moralism without preaching morality. Even though Keller, Stanley and Warren speak very differently I found the things they have in common very instructive and important for effective preaching.

All three men have passion and a conversational cadence. Their passion shows up in a way that communicates that they really want the listener to hear what they are saying. Sometimes this is expressed in speaking louder (but not yelling) and other times it's just clearly stating, "This is important." Their conversational style means that they seem to be speaking from the pulpit in the same way they speak across the dinner table and this is engaging. This style also contributes to their authority because they sound sincere rather than slick. It also allows the listener to relax and listen because they sound as if they are speaking to an individual rather than to a crowd.

Style may not determine whether a sermon is moralistic, but it can affect whether a congregation actually listens and this matters no matter what your goal is in preaching.

Self-Awareness

If I am to preach morality without preaching moralism I have to be self-aware and willing to examine what I really believe. If I say that I don't believe in moralism but my sermons tend to be hard-driving and motivated with guilt and shame I may be more

moralistic than I want to admit. This style may also reveal that I don't really trust the Holy Spirit to do the ultimate work of application in a listener's life.

On the other hand, if I say that I believe obedience is important to the Christian journey but I avoid the moral imperatives of Scripture I have to ask myself if I really believe this or if something else is going on. Am I afraid to say difficult things? Am I afraid to offend my listeners and perhaps lose their attendance? Am I afraid of facing my own failure in areas of morality?

To be self-aware requires acknowledging the potential for blind spots and soliciting input. I used to listen to a preacher who preached difficult or sobering passages of Scripture with a huge grin on his face. His style conflicted with his message. I know another preacher who can speak on forgiveness and compassion while sounding driven and angry. I do not think that either preacher is aware of his conflicting message and style. This motivates me to make sure I do not have similar blind spots.

Practical Implications for Ministry

The practical implications of this study are already playing out in my ministry in the areas of intentionality, shepherding, theological discipline, self-awareness and evangelism. I address each of these areas below:

Intentionality

I find that I am much more intentional about making sure that when preaching a moral imperative I am clear that obedience does not determine salvation but that it is the right response to our salvation. This may just be a sentence but I want to make sure I say it and say it clearly. I am also more intentional to make sure that I always preach a practical application alongside the beauty of the gospel. I want my listeners to not only be

inspired but also encouraged toward life-change that comes about through the gospel of grace, the indwelling Holy Spirit and personal commitment.

Shepherding

In my study of sanctification I became much more aware of my need to shepherd people toward Christ-likeness. Paul says that he is “in the pains of childbirth” until Christ is formed in those he leads (Galatians 4:19). I want to enter into this kind of care for those I preach to. I want to lead them in a way that is firm and yet tender and always invites them into the grace and the truth of the gospel. I have learned in my reading that preaching is a form of shepherding. When we preach we shepherd, we lead, we care and we demonstrate every dimension of the Scripture including morality and forgiveness and grace and perseverance and holiness and humility. 1 Peter 5:2 gives this charge: “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”

Theological Discipline

It matters what I believe because I will preach my belief. It is that simple. And so I am determined in my ministry to always be learning and to be careful how I communicate my theological positions. I want to be clear and humble. I want to be a learner and a dispenser of what I am learning so that I always live as a disciple and a disciple-maker. I want to learn from differing positions and I want to live in and communicate these tensions.

Self-Awareness

As a result of this study I am more apt to ask for input regarding my preaching style and content. I want to know how well I am preaching but I also want to know what is being heard when I preach. I am now asking my listeners and evaluators to answers specific questions about what I preach such as: What did you hear me say about Jesus? If you were not a Christian what would you have heard in this message about how one gains salvation? Did I give clear application to my message? What was that application? What was the message about morality in this sermon?

Evangelism

Every sermon is an opportunity to speak to the non-believer in the congregation regardless the intent of the sermon. I have learned from this research that if I am intentional I always have an opportunity to clear up misconceptions about the gospel and point people to a holy response to God's call on their life. For instance, I can make a quick comment about salvation by grace to clear up the idea that salvation is by works or self-effort. I can also be sure to give a clear application that puts on display God's holiness as well as his grace.

Research Regrets

There are a number of things I wish I had done differently in approaching the project design. If I were to do it again I would:

- 1. Solicite non-believers and non-ministers to listen to the sermon.** Significant to this thesis is to understand what is being heard in a sermon over and above what is being said. I know that I brought my own prejudices and pre-conceptions to listening to each sermon. I wish I had had at least 20-30 people listen to the same sermon and give

their feedback. It would have been extremely helpful to have non-believers and non-ministers say what they really heard about salvation and morality rather than just making a conjecture of what I think they would have heard.

2. Pick someone other than Bryan Chapell in the “Christ-centered Camp.” I assumed that because he wrote the book on Christ-centered preaching that he would be the best person to evaluate. Unfortunately, his actual preaching was not easily accessible, and in the end the few sermons I was able to listen to did not line up with the thesis of his book.

3. Listen to far more sermons. I felt limited by the number of sermons I listened to and unable to give an accurate critique of the four preachers I evaluated. I also think it would have been helpful if I could have critiqued sermons all preached within 18 months of one another. It felt a bit unfair to dissect sermons that some of these men preached over 10 years ago.

Further Research Possibilities

There are a number of possibilities for further research on this topic. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Examining the preaching of younger and emerging preachers such as Rob Bell, Mark Driscoll, Matt Chandler, Erwin McManus and Louie Giglio.

2. Research focused on how the non-believer and nominal church-goer hears morality and the gospel preached in a sermon.

3. How to preach morality without preaching moralism in narrative preaching.

4. Research focused on preaching the book of James without preaching moralism.

The book of James is filled with moral imperatives and contains the difficult passage

about salvation *not* being by faith alone. This research could be very helpful for the preacher preaching this book.

In conclusion, I believe that it is possible and imperative to preach morality without preaching moralism. The temptation is to avoid the moral imperatives altogether or preach with a driving cadence that suggests more self-effort and less cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Preachers can avoid this by being aware of the temptation, convinced of the redemptive story-line of all Scripture and passionate to always communicate grace and truth in a relevant and engaging way.

APPENDIX 1

CONTENT ANALYSIS AND RUBRIC

Content Analysis of a Sermon

Purpose of this Analysis

The purpose of this analysis is to discover how preachers preach issues of morality presented in the Scripture and if they do or do not preach moralism in the process.

Important Definitions

Morality

Issues of ethics; right and wrong. What the Bible says is proper and improper. For instance the admonition in Ephesians 4:25-32 to cease from falsehood, stealing, bitterness, anger and slander but to increase in kindness, gentleness and forgiveness. The Ten Commandments are also an example of moral imperatives in Scripture.

Preaching Morality

Preaching on issues of ethics. What the Bible says is proper or improper behavior.

When preaching morality preachers make a clear statement about the moral imperative. For instance, they may say, "First Corinthians six tells us to 'flee from sexual immorality.' We are not to commit sexual immorality."

Moralism

In this thesis "morality" is juxtaposed with "moralism." Moralism is the idea that the moral commands and/or a particular way of life are necessary to gain salvation. In contrast Christianity teaches that there is no way to earn the favor or acceptance of God for salvation. Eugene Peterson says, "Moralism means constructing a way of life in which I have no need of a saving God."¹

Preaching Moralism

Moralism is preached when a when a preacher preaches in a way that assumes people can pull themselves up by their bootstraps and gain salvation through moral living and/or certain moral/religious practices (attending church and tithing for example).

Preaching moralism is sometimes more difficult to detect than preaching morality. For instance, moralism might be preached when grace and the gospel are left out of a sermon and the listener is left to assume that the moral imperative preached is a means to salvation.

¹ Peterson, *Christ Danced*, 145.

For instance, if the preacher exhorts the congregation to be faithful or holy or courageous like a character in the Bible, but never explains that apart from the grace of God these traits will not earn favor with God, the listener will be prone to hear moralism. Luther said that the default of the human heart is religion—that left to their own understanding people, without gospel explanation, people will believe in salvation by works rather than salvation by grace. In light of this, when a sermon is only about life-change but does not insist that change is conceived by the work of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit, again, the uninformed listener may hear moralism.

For instance, the preacher might say, “Do not steal” but never explain that not stealing does not save you. This might lead the listener to believe that salvation is merely found in keeping this command.

Christocentric

Making Jesus Christ the focus.

Christocentric Preaching

A sermon which makes Jesus Christ central. This homiletical practice is contrasted in this thesis with anthropocentric preaching. For example, a sermon on David and Goliath is Christocentric when it points to the saving act of God to deliver the Israelites from Goliath and connects this to the saving act of Christ to save us all from our sin. In contrast, an anthropocentric sermon on David and Goliath would merely point to David as an example of courage.

To discover if a sermon or a point within a sermon is Christocentric ask: “Is the theological focus on Christ and his saving work of redemption or humans and their efforts?”

The Christocentric preacher might say, “David’s defeat of Goliath shows us that God uses the weak and the powerless to bring salvation to Israel. In the same way, Jesus came in weakness and went to a cross to bring about our salvation.”

The Anthropocentric preacher might say, “David shows us that even when we come against giants we can slay them if we are courageous.”

Gospel

The Gospel is the good news that salvation is by faith through grace alone (Ephesians 2:1-10). The gospel proclaims that our acceptance with God (righteousness) is made possible through the

life, death and resurrection of Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:21: “God made (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Preachers preach the gospel when they say things like:

“It is the desire of God that we live holy lives but we know that we do not attain our salvation by holy living, We are saved by the lavish, ludicrous love of God. We are saved by his grace alone. But, when he saves us he then empowers us to live holy lives by giving us his Holy Spirit.

Application

The practical “how-to” of the sermon.

Application gives the listener practical steps or insights into how to live out what has been preached. To discover if the preacher gives appropriate application, ask this of a sermon: “Was I given something to do and/or believe?”

Moral Application:

When preaching morality a preacher will not only tell the listener what not to do (steal, lie, gossip) or to do (love, forgive, be generous) but he/she will also tell them *how* to live these imperatives. For instance, they may say, “We are not to steal. This means not stealing from the government when we do our taxes and not taking office supplies home from work. Here are four ways to avoid stealing...”

Moralistic Application:

Moralistic application happens when the preacher gives the listeners practical things to do to change their lives but also implies that these changes bring salvation. For instance, if the preacher says, “To avoid God’s wrath we must stop lying. Here are three ways to stop lying...” and he or she does not explain salvation by grace or the necessary work of the Spirit to help us change this application would be moralistic.

Use this guide to analyze sermons for their ability to present morality without preaching moralism. See the previous page for key definitions.

Preacher's Name: _____

Title of the Sermon: _____

Passage Preached: _____

Date the Sermon was Preached: _____

Moral issue(s) addressed in this Sermon: _____

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
<u>Christocentric</u> How Many Times and when is Jesus/the gospel mentioned?		
<u>Application</u> How does the preacher apply this message to the behavior and heart of the listener? What does he/she call them to do?		

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
<u>Moralism</u> Did the preacher say anything that could be heard as moralistic? When? What?		

Summarize your Impression of this sermon

Was the application in this sermon moralistic or Christocentric?

Give a # here: _____ as well as putting an “x” on the line below

1	4	7
Anthropocentric	Somewhere in between	
Christocentric		

Overall, was this preacher able to preach morality without preaching moralism?

Give a # here: _____ as well as putting an “x” on the line below

1	4	7
Sermon fails in this regard	Partly successful	Beyond
question		

APPENDIX 2

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SERMONS ON SEXUAL PURITY

Content Analysis: Preaching Morality without Preaching Moralism

Use this guide to analyze sermons for their ability to present morality without preaching moralism. See the previous page for key definitions.

Preacher's Name: Rick Warren (and wife, Kay)

Title of the Sermon: Clear Thinking about Sex

Passage Preached: I Thessalonians 4

Date the Sermon was Preached: Unknown

Moral issue(s) addressed in this Sermon: Sexual purity

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
Christocentric How Many Times and when is Jesus/the gospel mentioned?	40:38	"I love Jesus Christ" - why he intends to stay pure - everything to him, paid for his sin... why would I drive another nail!!
Application How does the preacher apply this message to the behavior and heart of the listener? What does he/she call them to do?	4:33 7:30 13:30 16:00 20:00 25:20 45:40 49:45	<u>Four Positive Choices</u> 1. Make a Commitment to God's standard - God's standard: Sex only for marriage - kids - true love waits commitment! 2. Manage your mind 3. Minimize the Opportunities for Sexual Misconduct 4. Magnify the Consequences of sin <u>PATH BACK TO PURITY</u> 1. Repent 2. Receive forgiveness 3. Refocus & Replace — you want God's blessing in your life 4. Request help <u>HIGH on Application: each point</u> <u>— had numerous subpoints!</u>

Was the application in this sermon moralistic or Christocentric?

1 Anthropocentric X 4 Somewhere in between 7 Christocentric

Overall, was this preacher able to preach morality without preaching moralism?

1 4 7
Sermon fails in this regard Partly successful Beyond question

110

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
<u>Moralism</u> Did the preacher say anything that could be heard as moralistic? When? What?	41:43 44:07 41:43	<p>God will judge the sexually immoral</p> <p>one day people are going to stand before God and explain why you did what you wanted to do</p> <p>Healthy fear of judgment of God is motivation for purity</p> <p>I think that you could easily hear that you have to do all of these things to be saved. Wacker does say that "we all make mistakes" and that "we start over" but the emphasis on avoiding God's judgment w/out a clear gospel presentation or ^{equal} emphasis on grace could lead to moralism.</p>

Content Analysis: Preaching Morality without Preaching Moralism

Use this guide to analyze sermons for their ability to present morality without preaching moralism. See the previous page for key definitions.

Preacher's Name: Andy Stanley

Title of the Sermon: What about sex?

Passage Preached: I Thessalonians 4:8

Date the Sermon was Preached: Unknown

Moral issue(s) addressed in this Sermon: Sexual Purity

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
Christocentric How Many Times and when is Jesus/the gospel mentioned?		2-3 times - Mostly refers to God rather than Jesus but says little of God or Jesus throughout sermon
Application How does the preacher apply this message to the behavior and heart of the listener? What does he/she call them to do?	16:54 22:05 25:20 27:04 30:10 33:40 38:30-38	Talks about how to avoid sexual immorality - Distance yourself from anything that pulls us to sex Ask @ to intervene Self-control - from H. E Control body What women hear - "women you have potential to mess up my sanctification." Ladies "you're responsible for yourself and those around you" Things you have to do: 1. Embrace @'s standard 2. Confession - to @ & people you've hurt 3. Distance - people/phone calls/ 4. Truth - mega doses of Scripture/memorize

Summarize your Impression of this sermon

Was the application in this sermon moralistic or Christocentric?

Give a # here: 3 as well as putting an "x" on the line below

1 Anthropocentric X Somewhere in between 7 Christocentric
~~Start from where I am about what to "do" here~~

Overall, was this preacher able to preach morality without preaching moralism?

Give a # here: 4 as well as putting an "x" on the line below

1 Sermon fails in this regard X Partly successful 7 Beyond question
I would not say Jesus was exalted

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
<p><u>Moralism</u> Did the preacher say anything that could be heard as moralistic? When? What?</p>		<p>Not sure anything was said that would cause you to think you had to be sexually pure to gain salvation but he does not mention the gospel.</p> <p>His statements to women seemed over-the-top and a bit grounded in shame/guilt.</p>

Content Analysis: Preaching Morality without Preaching Moralism

Use this guide to analyze sermons for their ability to present morality without preaching moralism. See the previous page for key definitions.

Preacher's Name: Tim Keller

Title of the Sermon: Sex

Passage Preached: I Thessalonians 4:3-8

Date the Sermon was Preached: June 30, 1996

Moral issue(s) addressed in this Sermon: Sexual Purity

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
<p>Christocentric How Many Times and when is Jesus/the gospel mentioned?</p>	<p>23:00</p> <p>35:40</p>	<p>God sent His Son as the sacrifice for you</p> <p>Jesus is the true love of our souls - even the best marriage is a pretense of that & can never scratch itch you feel</p> <p>Mentions Jesus only a few times; major emphasis of era</p>
<p>Application How does the preacher apply this message to the behavior and heart of the listener? What does he/she call them to do?</p>	<p>7:11</p> <p>13:42</p> <p>15:00</p> <p>21:05</p> <p>21:46</p> <p>25:27ff</p> <p>23:</p>	<p>Clear that sex is for marriage</p> <p>Is focused on changing our <u>BELIEF</u> about premarital sex to change action.</p> <p>2 Principles of Nian Understanding of sex</p> <p>① Goodness</p> <p>② CONTEXT</p> <p>BIBLICAL SEX = marriage. period.</p> <p>(always bad for women) - Premarital = wrong = b/c Violates</p> <p>Biblical sex ethic - can't separate body and soul</p> <p>SEX is marriage - THEOLOGICAL</p> <p>Never intimacy w/out commitment</p> <p>PURPOSE - take wife in honor not lust</p> <p>SEX → honor another person</p>

Summarize your Impression of this sermon

Was the application in this sermon moralistic or Christocentric?

Give a # here: 7 as well as putting an "x" on the line below

1	4	7
Anthropocentric	Somewhere in between	Christocentric

Overall, was this preacher able to preach morality without preaching moralism?

Give a # here: 5 as well as putting an "x" on the line below

1	4		7
Sermon fails in this regard	Partly successful	X	Beyond question

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
<p><u>Moralism</u> Did the preacher say anything that could be heard as moralistic? When? What?</p>		<p>He does not say anything that could be heard as moralistic. Clear about Jesus as the fatal sacrifice for humankind</p> <p>But could have gone made a more direct statement</p>

Content Analysis: Preaching Morality without Preaching Moralism

Use this guide to analyze sermons for their ability to present morality without preaching moralism. See the previous page for key definitions.

Preacher's Name: Bryan Chapell

Title of the Sermon: Between the Fences

Passage Preached: I Thessalonians 4

Date the Sermon was Preached: _____

Moral issue(s) addressed in this Sermon: sex/choices/sanctification

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
Christocentric How Many Times and when is Jesus/the gospel mentioned?	7:15 9:25	Authority of Lord Jesus Xian righteousness is established by Q 3-4 X Q's will that you be more like Jesus / Doesn't say much about Jesus
Application How does the preacher apply this message to the behavior and heart of the listener? What does he/she call them to do?	12:44 13:4	Most of the Application focused on how we make choices — Q's Sanctification — — avoid sexual immorality — — purity — — outside of marriage ⇒ sex - impure/wrong Sexual immorality affects others Application - ① Do what Q says ② If God is silent — there is freedom

Summarize your Impression of this sermon

Was the application in this sermon moralistic or Christocentric?

Give a # here: 4 as well as putting an "x" on the line below

1	4	7
Anthropocentric	Somewhere in between	Christocentric

Overall, was this preacher able to preach morality without preaching moralism?

Give a # here: 4 as well as putting an "x" on the line below

1	4	7
Sermon fails in this regard	Partly successful	Beyond question

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
<p><u>Moralism</u> Did the preacher say anything that could be heard as moralistic? When? What?</p>		<p>Seemed to be speaking to an 'all Christian' audience</p> <p>if a non-Christian was listening they might assume that to be right w/ God is simply to follow His mtl. (w/out regard to 'saving grace')</p>

APPENDIX 3

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SERMONS ON COMMANDMENT THREE

Content Analysis: Preaching Morality without Preaching Moralism

Use this guide to analyze sermons for their ability to present morality without preaching moralism. See the previous page for key definitions.

Preacher's Name: Tim Keller

Title of the Sermon: The Freedom of Commitment

Passage Preached: Exodus 20:7 (and Matt. 7:15-23)

Date the Sermon was Preached: May 15, 1994

Moral issue(s) addressed in this Sermon: Shall not take God's name in vain

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
Christocentric How Many Times and when is Jesus/the gospel mentioned?	3:45 10:30 11:15 11:50 21:00	21:15 : Gospel - adoption illustration Jesus gives best example - Matt. 7 one thing to say you have my name another to really... Thoroughness of the Gospel of manna's descent Jesus explaining - you can use his name and not know him You have other day before that was sr. reality I can behold - love of & answered in X 28: X = CANON 29:00 Gospel
Application How does the preacher apply this message to the behavior and heart of the listener? What does he/she call them to do?	24:52 3:13 7:52 17:30 19:20 25:14	Take name of X in reality Redefines command (not just cursing/using frivolously) We use O's name to open doors but don't have Spiritual Reality to back it up - Spiritual Reality - Intimate Relationship / Grasp Grace - Submission to will of One you know POINTS 1. DOING THE WILL OF O 2. HAVE TO GRASP THE GRACE - Gospel! NOT being a hypocrite!

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
<u>Moralism</u> Did the preacher say anything that could be heard as moralistic? When? What?		Clear presentation of Gospel multiple times. Confronts Moralism - Jesus says that you can have a right doctrine, emotional engagement and Xian activity and <u>NOT</u> truly know Him. Jesus = Savior (we are <u>not</u>) God accepts us b/c of what X did.

Summarize your Impression of this sermon

Was the application in this sermon moralistic or Christocentric?

Give a # here: 7 as well as putting an "x" on the line below
all about Jesus

1 4 ~~7~~
 Anthropocentric Somewhere in between Christocentric

Overall, was this preacher able to preach morality without preaching moralism?

Give a # here: 7 as well as putting an "x" on the line below
gives gospel presentation and illustration (edaphon)

1 4 ~~7~~
 Sermon fails in this regard Partly successful Beyond question

Content Analysis: Preaching Morality without Preaching Moralism

Use this guide to analyze sermons for their ability to present morality without preaching moralism. See the previous page for key definitions.

Preacher's Name: RICK WARREN

Title of the Sermon: Taking God Seriously

Passage Preached: EX. 20: 7

Date the Sermon was Preached: _____

Moral issue(s) addressed in this Sermon: "Take my name seriously"

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
Christocentric How Many Times and when is Jesus/the gospel mentioned?	20:50 31:54 32:20	Power in the name of Jesus Why do we pray in name of Jesus? - no way to come to God on our own - He is bridge, we come in His power and grace 5 times
Application How does the preacher apply this message to the behavior and heart of the listener? What does he/she call them to do?	33:10 33:34 5:40 9:18 35:00 32:10 22:05 ↓ 20:20	skip judgment by trusting in name of Jesus - he forgives ACTS 4:12 John 20:31 - All doomed unless we have a Savior - Jesus - Wash in mouth out w/ soap won't work - need change of heart → Jesus came do that! How we misuse God's name - - insult - idolize - intimidate - impress - impulsively Don't curse/swear 26:08 - story of family who made a swearing jar 35:00 submit to do about cursing - say sorry - commit life to X - Discipline - God is always w/ you - ask God to help "Who will be judged for every idle word you say" - you can store the judgment (32:20) Use God's name correctly - Reverence - Know His Name - Represent His name clearly - Rely on His name → Clean up mouth!

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
<u>Moralism</u> Did the preacher say anything that could be heard as moralistic? When? What?		<i>clear that X gives power to change and X is way to salvation.</i>

Summarize your Impression of this sermon

Was the application in this sermon moralistic or Christocentric?

Give a # here: 6 as well as putting an "x" on the line below
— clear that Jesus must help us

1	4	7
Anthropocentric	Somewhere in between	Christocentric

X

Overall, was this preacher able to preach morality without preaching moralism?

Give a # here: 6 as well as putting an "x" on the line below
clear gospel but so many "to dos" this could get lost

1	4	7
Sermon fails in this regard	Partly successful	Beyond question

X

Content Analysis: Preaching Morality without Preaching Moralism

Use this guide to analyze sermons for their ability to present morality without preaching moralism. See the previous page for key definitions.

Preacher's Name: ANDY STANLEY

Title of the Sermon: The Sinai Code Part 3: What's in a Name

Passage Preached: Exodus 20: 7

Date the Sermon was Preached: _____

Moral issue(s) addressed in this Sermon: Don't misuse the name of the Lord

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
Christocentric How Many Times and when is Jesus/the gospel mentioned?	13:25 15:00 35:10	In time of Jesus m's use of G's name - used it for leverage messiah crucified by rel. leaders / 3x more G-centered; a does it stuff
Application How does the preacher apply this message to the behavior and heart of the listener? What does he/she call them to do?	5-25 10:20 27:14 ↓ 30:15 34:00	Clears up misconception of command not to use G's name when mad Don't misuse name of the Lord - don't associate name w/ something G is not assoc. c - don't leverage name of G - don't "use" God to get your way Don't use G to dodge G (I John 1:9) - Thinking I can do what I want and ask forgiveness (cheap) → forgiveness for people turning away from sin not forgiveness for people trying to stay in sin ↓ Reason as long as dodging the will of God in the name of God → you're going to miss God Bottom line: Don't use God to justify sin

Question	Time in Sermon	Observation
<u>Moralism</u> Did the preacher say anything that could be heard as moralistic? When? What?		<i>No. Very clear that you can't "earn" God's favor.</i>

Summarize your Impression of this sermon

Was the application in this sermon moralistic or Christocentric?

Give a # here: 6 as well as putting an "x" on the line below *- More Christ-centric than Christocentric*

1	4	X	7
Anthropocentric	Somewhere in between		Christocentric

Overall, was this preacher able to preach morality without preaching moralism?

Give a # here: 7 as well as putting an "x" on the line below *- Very clear!*

1	4	7
Sermon fails in this regard	Partly successful	Beyond question

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